

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Wild

MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

ISSUE
148

WALKING IN ICELAND
POLAR PADDLING
BAGGING PIKIRAKITAHU
MOUNT BUFFALO TRACK NOTES
TASSIE'S BEN LOMOND
RELIVE SEA-TO-SUMMIT
GAITER REVIEWS
BUSH POETRY

Chasing glaciers



The Arctic fox
Backcountry safety
Splitboarding for beginners
Warming winter recipes
Quentin walks an empty beach



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Wild

AUSTRALIAN WILDLIFE ADVENTURE AND DISCOVERY

Established 1981

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WARNING

The activities covered
in this magazine are
dangerous. Undertaking
them without proper training,
experience, skill, regard to
safety and equipment could
result in serious injury or death.



Cover The colourful
gorge of Markliffjöt,
Iceland. Ian Brown

Contents Night closes on
Ben Lomond, Tasmania.
Jessica Hancock



"The wintry clouds drop spangles on the mountains. If the thing occurred once in a century historians would chronicle and poets would sing of the event..."

JOHN TYNDALL

In praise of H₂O

In issue 146, I waxed lyrical about bodies of water and their effects on us. That was quite a philosophical treatise. My feelings about this simple molecule were stirred again while watching George Miller's high-octane reboot of his *Mud Max* franchise, in which people struggle to live in a world where water is venerated as the most precious of resources.

So, as we arrive at the colder months of the year, I'd like to return to the subject of water, but to place it within a more scientific context this time.

The specific properties of this relatively simple molecule make water one of the most interesting substances found on Earth. Despite this, the majority of people find it so commonplace as to be mundane.

Just two hydrogen atoms and an oxygen atom, it turns out, form a structure complex enough to act as the lynchpin of all life we know of. The fact that when two water molecules meet, a hydrogen atom from one can become (quite) strongly attracted to the oxygen of the other is critical to many biological processes. This is the power of the hydrogen bond.

For example, if it weren't for hydrogen bonding then trees would not be able to grow nearly as tall – it's a combination of the attractive forces of hydrogen bonding and evaporation that drives transpiration in plants.

A more mechanical process occurs within our own bodies, as blood is shunted around the body, sometimes squeezing through very small gaps or flowing easily against the forces of gravity. This is facilitated by that unique property of water combined with the frenetic pulsations of the heart.

What we commonly think of as surface tension, which allows water striders and

various other insects to traverse the surface of a pond, is simply yet another example of water's hydrogen power.

In nearly every other instance, liquids are simple to define. Take any other common element or molecule found on the surface of the planet and you'll find that its liquid form is less dense than the solid. If you had never seen the weird quirks of H₂O before, then you would certainly not expect ice to float in your glass let alone an iceberg to float in the sea. Imagine, then, how gobsmacked you would be at the sight of a snowflake under the microscope.

Throughout history, the uniqueness of water in all its forms has been exemplified by the many words used to describe it. From tunnel to hoarfrost, our words seem almost as influenced by this multifaceted substance as our daily lives.

For this reason, this winter issue of *Wild* aims to capture as many of these unique water structures as possible. Our contributors have visited both the Antarctic and Arctic Circles in order to capture these natural phenomena, with room enough left to consider the state of this resource as it exists at home.

Some of you may be lucky enough to spend time this winter season delighting in Australian snowfields (or beyond). As you do so, spare a thought for your own good fortune that such a weird and wonderful substance exists.

Campbell Phillips
Editor

Wild

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Issue 147, May-June 2015



valued at \$219. These adjustable aluminium trekking poles feature breathable straps and foam grips for continuous comfort.

LETTER OF THE ISSUE
Jeanette wins a Therm-a-Rest TREO valued at \$179.95.
 This camp chair has a realistic seat height and width so that it's no hassle to get in or out of, while still packing away into its own tripod base.
Alexander wins a set of MSR Swift™ 2 Walking Poles

OPEN LETTER TO SMOKERS

These days few things annoy me (and make me want to throw a beloved snow boot out the window) more than smokers in the snow. As a non-smoker I find that smokers in general are selfish beings blocking door ways to building entries, cafes and openly indulging in their expensive addiction and forcing this onto others unfortunate enough to pass by. As such, here is an open letter to all those nicotine addicts:

Please take a moment to pop a mint in your mouth, sit back, relax and reconsider before flicking your lighter and lighting up another in our snowfields.

As an unofficial social group you seem to have the belief that it is your right to smoke in the car parks, in the lift queues, on the lifts and even in general areas at the bottom of runs. If you're willing to take your love of high-risk activities as far as smoking – fair enough. We live in a democratic country where your choice to harm yourself is your right. But please do take a moment to think about the damage you are causing to the snowfields and the animals that live there. Just because your used and unloved cigarette butt isn't going to cause the mountain to flare up in a life threatening bushfire during snow season doesn't mean that it's OK to throw your discarded addiction out the window, in the parking lot or off the lift. Unfortunately these are common sightings in Australia, with so very few of you carrying cigarette disposal containers.

I don't particularly enjoy stealing your

money as you force me to passively smoke your cigarettes as your smoke is blown across my face, hair and clothes on the chair lift.

Why would anyone want to hurt a wombat? Your discarded waste causes unwarranted risk to the wildlife that also shares your love of the snow. Not to mention how unattractive it is to see the pristine white snow scattered with smooched mustard-coloured cigarette butts.

Did you know that if you opted to not smoke 119 cigarettes, the equivalent of six packs, you could buy yourself a one-day lift pass to a mainstream resort such as Mount Buller or Mount Hotham? If you smoke only one pack a week, you are robbing yourself financially of the chance to buy a seasons lift pass and even have cash left over for a cider or beer at the end of the day (yes even at the crazy resort prices). This year Whistler announced a total no-smoking blanket across the entire resort. With so much to gain and so little to lose, it's time for Australian snow sport lovers to take the first steps and preserve the pristine alpine environment that we all enjoy and wish to continue enjoying in years to come.

See you on the slopes,

**Jeanette Cheney
 Flemington, VIC**

OUTDOOR LEGACIES

I was pleased to see your 'Blast from the Past' column in a recent issue of *Wild* (146). Nick was a friend whom I (and others) had walked with many years ago and being able to bring his children into the bush so early in their lives was a great achievement. The article helped lots of other new parents take up the challenge. His tragic and fatal accident some years back was a big loss to the outdoor community, but he left some good legacies like his now-grown children who continue to appreciate their early days in the outdoors as well as Gooches Crater in Wollangambe.

**Jim Scarsbrook
 Ulladulla, NSW**

BAD WEATHER?

Whether touring the country by motorbike, sailing or any kind of adventure that puts a person out in the elements, you can come to realise a few simple truths in life. Now I've been a reader of *Wild* for a while now, and I particularly enjoyed reading Louise Fairfax's feature 'Sleeping on summits' in issue 145. Not because of the trials she went through in surviving in

sub-zero conditions on top of a mountain, but because it reminded me of one of those simple truths. An old neighbour of mine used to be very fond of saying, "There's no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing" and I think that's something everyone will learn if they spend enough time outside.

**Kim O'Connor
 Mount Ommamney, QLD**

MISSING TRUTHS

I was quite enjoying my first ever read of *Wild* magazine. While slightly amused by the breathless, boys-own adventure approach of the article on the Osmond Range ('Red cliffs & dry creeks', issue 146), I found myself increasingly appalled at the complete absence of any mention of Aboriginal peoples of this land. In fact, it was emphasised how empty and remote the place was - Terra Nullius all over again. No reflection by our walkers about what sacred sites might be traversed, no wondering about who had gone before. No respect for the history of those precious waterholes, no mention of the gruesome history of displacement. All about dehydrated food and the hardships endured even with 21st century kit. In this light, the line about being glad to be Australian just made me very sad for all of us and wondering when mainstream Australia will ever truly accept the truth of our land.

**Margaret Sleath
 via email**

SPIRIT HIGH

I would like to thank *Wild* for profiling my son, Mick in issue 147. Mick was an avid reader of *Wild* magazine from an early age. He would come with me as a youngster into a newsagent – I would pick up the papers while he was always looking through the outdoor mags. He would put some back and I do remember him saying, "Dad, this is Australian about real Australian people and places." Needless to say I was an easy touch; he realised he could always get me to buy it for him. After reading the mags he would pick out articles for me to read. Later when he started work, he took out a subscription himself – it would have been one of the first things he did with his first few paychecks. He had stacks of editions of *Wild* in his room (and later, his house). I am sure some of his trips were a result of articles he read in your magazine.

**Bruce Parker
 Dandenong, VIC**

THE WINNER: BUSHWALKING TIP



On a recent walk along the South Coast Track in Tassie I had forgotten to pack a pair of thongs. The picture shows a pair I made from recycling a plastic crate and rope found at Prion Beach. They did the job and are very light!

Kent Holman
Toowoomba, QLD

Kent wins a Therm-a-Rest SLACKER, valued at \$125. This recently released hammock delivers in comfort with its seamless construction and supple fabric, perfect for winding down on after a long day.



BUSHWALKING TIP



The alcohol hand gel used for disinfecting your hands is also an effective deodorant. Rubbed under the armpits once a day it not only cleans and deodorises, it kills the bacteria that cause the odour in the first place. (As a doctor I have also been recommending it to patients who have skin reactions to the usual antiperspirant deodorants. It is usually well tolerated).

John Oakley
North Gosford, NSW



BUSHWALKING TIP



If you are heading somewhere cold and need to carry water, without it freezing up, here is what I do: take an insulated hot water bottle. In the morning, boil the water for the hot water bottle, to carry, have a warm drink with it during the day as a bonus. At night, boil the water again for the hot water bottle and have a lovely warm sleep. Great for warming up cold feet after a day in the snow!

Rune Jasminida
via email

CORRECTION

A lapse in editorial rigour has led to a section of a previous Track Notes feature to find its way into last issue's (167) Track Notes on the Eastern Arthurs. A section regarding accommodation and maps on page 67 pertains to Lord Howe Island and readers are advised to ignore this section. *Wild* apologises for this error and we encourage any readers to contact us directly should they see something of concern.

Readers' letters & tips are welcome and could win you a useful piece of outdoor kit.

Write to *Wild*, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, VIC 3025 or email wild@primecreative.com.au



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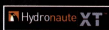
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Photo by Geoff Murray

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Frozen formations

Wild reader, Brock Mifsud writes: *My friend Dan convinced me to go on an impromptu ice climbing trip to Colorado in December 2014. I do some rock climbing in Australia, but had never been ice climbing before. We ended up in Ouray (the 'Switzerland of America') at the famous ice park there. With a top temperature of -7 degrees celsius during the day I froze and became an ice climber! This is a photo of Casey - a guy from Seattle that we met in Ouray on the ice.*

Photographer's checklist: Snowy scenes

- When shooting in very snowy settings, your camera is looking to find the mid tone, or 18 per cent grey in the scene, to give correct exposure. Therefore it will compensate by under-exposing your shot to meet its settings, which in turn will render the scene, and snow, as off-white or grey. When shooting in snow I always shoot in centre-weighted metering mode, allowing me to give the camera a bit more guidance to what I am exposing for.
- You can also try over exposing by one to 1.5 stops to combat the same issue. Cameras will have a +/- exposure compensation dial. In a high key scene, set the exposure to +1 to +1.5. Your shots will be brighter but the snow will be rendered correctly as white, and not dirty grey. NB: Some post production is required to ensure your scene looks exposed correctly and your contrast is correct. Using this tip will assist you in getting nice, bright, clean images when shooting in the snow.
- Most snow shoots include dynamic, active subjects. To ensure that you capture that gnarly snowboard jump or skier zooming past, you will need to use higher shutter speeds. In such a highlighted scene like the snow, your camera should already be thinking "bright scene; faster shutter speed", if not, try and use your camera on the Shutter Priority mode, either represented by TV or S modes depending on your camera brand. This allows you to choose a faster shutter action and the camera will choose a suitable aperture.
- Essential Snow photography items: Circular polarising filter (this will achieve punchier colours, beautiful deep blue skies and reduce reflections), lens hood (reduces further glare off the snow and sun) and a cleaning cloth (snow is just frozen water, so you'll want to ensure you're not letting any into the camera body or lens).



Award-winning landscape photographer Cameron Blake runs weekend workshops and six-day tours on the Overland Track. His next tour departs on the 7th of January, 2016.
overlandphototours.com.au



Brock wins a five-piece X-Set from Sea To Summit and an Apollo lantern from Black Diamond, all courtesy of Paddy Pallin. That's a specialist adventure cookware kit including one X-Pot, two X-Bowls and two X-Mugs, all of which collapse down for easy packing, plus the highly-portable LED lantern for

nocturnal cooking. Valued at \$195. For your chance to win a quality piece of outdoor kit, send your humorous, inspiring or spectacular shots to wild@primcreative.com.au.

To be considered for the September/October Wild Shot, submit your best photo by July 27.

Warrnambool Heavy Hitters win Serra Terror

This year's Serra Terror endurance challenge saw teams compete in a gruelling two-day trek over ground set to become part of the Grampians Peaks Trail.

Taking place over the Queen's Birthday long weekend (June 6-7), the annual event was held for the sixth time and attracted one of its largest crowds yet.

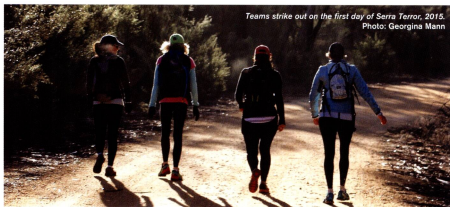
Organiser Keri Ross said that they hosted as many as 300 participants at this year's Serra Terror, which she describes as "an absolute success".

"We had to cap the attendance to a total of 46 teams," Ross said. "Much of the course was actually off-track, which means that there is a risk someone might get lost no matter how well marked the route is, so maintaining management numbers is critical."

Luckily, Ross told Wild in interview, no one was lost over the course of this year's Serra Terror.

The route, which struck out from Dunkeld towards Mount Abrupt, looped back on itself at Signal Peak before returning to the starting point – a total of around 80 kilometres all told. And while some of the route made use of 4WD and single tracks, some of the harshest gradients were achieved only through thick scrub.

"Heading up the back of Mount Abrupt you



Teams strike out on the first day of Serra Terror, 2015.
Photo: Georgina Mann

have to push through completely trackless bush," Ross explained. "Although we had great weather for the event itself, it had been raining a bit recently and so participants were also slogging through damp conditions for much of the event."

Ross said that, in order to keep the event fresh and interesting, the route is changed every year. This also helps keep an even playing field for the competitors.

While Serra Terror is popular for trailrunners and bushwalkers alike, even the runners were forced to slow on occasion as a result of the terrain.

Such was the case for the winning team from

Warrnambool, dubbed the 'Heavy Hitters'.

The four athletes, Sam Edney, Leigh Kane, Travis Greening and Luke Taylor completed the race with a time of 12 hours and three minutes over the two days, beating the runners up by 90 minutes.

Speaking The Standard, Kane said the event had taken him "far out" of his comfort zone. "The first day was borderline horrendous," he said.

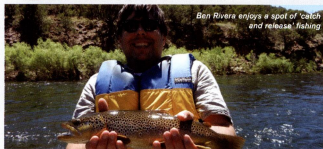
"You're climbing down rocks and there's sticks belting into you all the way through, so scratches, bumps and bruises are all part of it."



www.dunkeldadventure.com.au

60
Seconds
with

Ben Rivera president of Leatherman



Ben Rivera enjoys a spot of 'catch and release' fishing

How has the Leatherman brand evolved in the past five or so years?

We used to be very engineering-centric. The way we have evolved is in being prepared for the unexpected. Industrial design and seeking input from the customers has evolved from being a pure technology push to a need-seeking push: looking for a problem to solve. There's also been a definite focus in evolving the brand into Eastern markets. I think the evolution is more in focusing how customers think, what they want and how it fits their lifestyle and aesthetic senses. One thing that hasn't changed is our commitment to organic design.

What process do your products undergo from conception to market launch?

We start with a marketing-led product manager, who identifies a

problem in the market by looking at trends, as well as what markets does Leatherman aspire to get into and the customer's needs. Then we articulate these problems to the design team. We give the design team creative control and freedom. In essence, we identify a problem (e.g. not being able to get on a plane with a multi-tool), then we identify what we need to do this, what we imagine the tool will be used for (e.g. opening up airline peanuts, cutting tags off clothes or wristbands etc). We figure out what the needs are and build a tool accordingly. It's very much a narrative process.

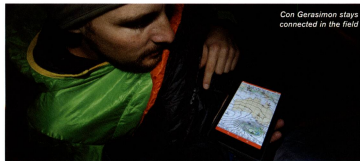
How are you personally involved in this?

I come from the design side and have to interpret what the customer needed. I'm kind of the person who holds the innovation bar very high. I'm all about helping the design and engineering team challenge the marketing team. The designers will often do what the marketers want. That's why I'm the one constantly asking, "but why" of the marketing team and getting the design team to create a truly innovative product.

What would the ultimate product be if you had access to unrestricted resources?

Bionic gloves made of very thin materials that allow you to do whatever you can do with a Leatherman tool with your bare hands.

Dawn of the 'always-connected' adventurer?



Con Gerasimon stays connected in the field

Remote communications have come a long way since the first telegraph line was erected in Australia during the 1850s, yet for the last few years little has changed for outdoor users.

For at least the past decade, those heading into the wilderness will tend to pack either an emergency beacon and/or a satellite phone as a matter of course; both of which being considered 'just in case' devices.

The personal locator beacon fits this mould perfectly, as it is only ever activated in the case of a legitimate emergency, with search and rescue costs generally considered astronomical. On the other hand, the use of a satellite phone may not incur the same one-time costs, but they're generally considered nevertheless expensive due to sign up fees and call costs.

Australia has also been plagued with a relative lack of options in the satellite phone market. While there are a number of retailers, just two brands exist to service the casual user: Inmarsat and Iridium.

Now these companies are breaking ground with a new type of product in the market, the satellite 'hub'. A device that promises to allow you to connect your own device to their satellite networks in order to make calls, send or receive emails and whatever else you might like to do online.

Neil Jamieson, sales manager for Applied Satellite Technology (AST) Australia - a retailer of Inmarsat and Iridium satellite devices - explained how consumer behaviour is beginning to drive demand for these products.

"It's great when you have a friend or family member send you a photo from their latest adventure," he said, "but it means so much more when they're still out there doing it, rather than sending you that photo on the way home."

Both the Iridium Go! and Inmarsat's IsatHub are available on the market now, but for those interested in purchasing this kind of device, be sure to shop around first. Much like satellite phones, satellite hubs are often sold on plans including subscription fees and hefty data charges.

However, should these devices become significantly more affordable in the coming years, we can expect the world of technology to encroach further into the field of adventuring.

Wild Women Adventure Race 2,

QLD, July 11

Australia's first all-female adventure race will open its second event for 2015. Covering multiple disciplines, this event will take place in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast. dareyouadventure.com.au

The Great Adventure Challenge,

WA, July 25

Team-based multisport racing that includes mountain biking, trailrunning, kayaking and coastering as well as a series of 'mystery tasks'. greatadventurechallenge.com.au

Paddy Pallin Adventure Series,

NSW, August 1-2

The Lower Blue Mountains leg of this multisport series continues Paddy Pallin's tradition of events aimed at introducing people to adventure racing. paddypallinadventure.com.au

XPD 2015, QLD, August 3-14

Expedition-length adventure.

Teams of four compete over a 700km course that includes trekking, mountain biking and kayaking over a 5-10 day period. www.xpd.com.au

Adventure Showcase, NSW, August 8

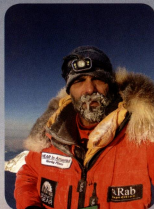
Trek & Travel's annual Adventure Showcase is set to take place at the retailer's Sydney location, featuring intrepid speakers, gear demonstrations and prize giveaways. trekandtravel.com.au/blog/events

Burke and Wills Trek,

QLD, August 16-26

330km, 11-day trek following the path of Burke and Wills through south-western Queensland and north-eastern South Australia. www.burkeandwillstrek.com.au

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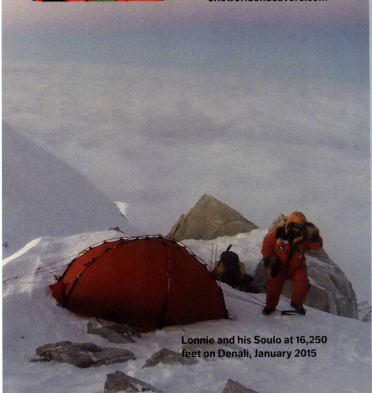


Lonnie Dupre

Iconic cold-weather adventurer with a life-long passion for snow and ice. Uses a Hilleberg Soulo. A few of his accomplishments:

- » First solo winter ascent of Denali in January.
- » First circumnavigation of Greenland.
- » First summer expedition to the North Pole.

Learn more about Lonnie at oneworldendeavors.com



Lonnie and his Soulo at 16,250 feet on Denali, January 2015

"ON MY PREVIOUS DENALI winter climbs, I'd always used snow caves because I couldn't find a tent that I trusted to handle the hurricane-force winds and heavy snow loads and that would allow for easy set-up in extreme cold. Then I found the Soulo. Hilleberg uses the best materials and tent fabric on the market!"

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Survival: The avalanche on Everest

Adventure Consultants base camp manager Anthea Fisher recounts the moment an avalanche crashed through the tents on Everest



Looking up and seeing the massive wall of snow and ice coming towards the camp was horrifying. Just as realising your only shelter is limited to tents and terrain features.

I don't remember making a conscious decision about where to shelter. I doubt there was really time. I ran into our mess tent and positioned myself half-in and half-out, hedging my bets. I didn't want to be inside for fear of the tent collapsing on me, but I knew I could not survive being outside.

The avalanche hit with elemental force. The air was suffocating, filled with so much snow, ice and rocks. To be honest, I don't recall much about the avalanche. I was hit by flying objects, on the back on the head, the hands and the face. I know this, as I had the bumps and cuts to prove it. It was only a week later, when I finally had a shower, that I appreciated the battering I had taken, my body peppered with bruises.

After the avalanche passed I was left gasping – gasping for air, gasping for life. I was just happy to be alive.

My hat and hair were caked in snow. My radio, which had been in my pocket, the only one I now had, was also caked in snow, the transmit button stuck on. It was useless. I threw it in the snow, angry at it for not working, angry for this damn avalanche.

I knew immediately not everyone would have fared so well. This was quickly proven to be true: base camp had been completely obliterated. Not five metres from me lay our first casualty. He had died instantly. Our camp doctor looked up at me with tears in his eyes and said what I already knew, what was already obvious. I grabbed the closest thing to me, a pink floral tablecloth and covered him. We had no time to dwell; I knew that others needed help.

It was like stepping into a war zone. The extent of the injuries that the Sherpas suffered was horrific. Yet there was so little we could do without being able to locate our medical supplies. Our medical tent, like everything else, had blown away – it was impossible to find anything. We felt helpless. Completely helpless. All we could do was try to control any bleeding and make them comfortable and warm with the down jackets that were now strewn around camp.

I grabbed the remnants of a tent and gathered those that I could under, trying to shelter them from the light snow that had begun to fall. Trying to create some structure, some order, something, out of the ruins of our camp.

And what of Camp 1? I almost couldn't bear to think, but I had to get a call out. I had to

find the radio and make it work. Somehow I found it, still lying in the snow where I had thrown it. I cleared the snow from it and called to Camp 1. They were OK – thank God, they were OK. They asked how we were. What was there to say? The shakiness in my voice would have been enough to paint the picture. I kept it brief and to the point: "base camp has been obliterated, we expect mass casualties, we have no comms".

It wasn't too long before the call came over the radio from one of the other teams further down camp, the offer of assistance. It was welcome solace in the midst of the chaos that surrounded me. Before that call came, part of me believed that all of base camp had suffered the same fate as us, that we were alone in our efforts.

We sent the "walking wounded" down towards them. The injured were relieved to know they were on their way to getting medical help, relieved they were walking, even if they were wounded.

Relief washed over me again on seeing a familiar face walk through the 'junkyard' that our camp had become. The look on his face said it all: the disbelief, the horror and the sadness.

The teams that still had facilities quickly organised themselves, and those with medical skills in setting up a makeshift hospital. Everyone did what they could to help, whether it was carrying the wounded, caring for the injured, caring for those caring for the injured, and providing a home to the 'Base Camp refugees' that we had become.

The community that came together and cared from all those in need was incredible.

It showed me a different side to the Everest scene. One that was so different to the one often reported about. All of that petty, cheap journalistic spin fell away, and this was just about people. People that needing help and people helping them. It was about humanity.

Five days later I walked out of base camp to begin the three-day trek out to the plane that would take me to Kathmandu. Tears streamed uncontrollably down my face.

Crying for the broken lives and the broken families. Crying for those that survived, but with a broken spirit. Crying for myself and my own broken spirit.

I stopped on the section of the track where the black summit of Sagarmatha becomes visible. I watched the cloud plume from the top. Despite all this place had shown me and given me: the pain, the loss, the heartbreak; I was captivated. Somewhere in my broken spirit now lived a mountain, along with all the people that live and work in her shadow.

Please donate to the Adventure Consultants Sherpa Future Fund if you would like to help support the AC Sherpas affected by the April 25, 2015 earthquake in Nepal.



www.adventureconsultants.com/adventure/AC_Sherpa_Fund/

UTS plans futuristic portable shelter



*Ebba Walldör, Benedict Anderson and David Pigram.
Photo by Joanne Saad*

By combining modern 3D modeling with age-old weaving and knitting techniques, researchers at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) hope to create the portable shelter of the future.

Yet this structure aspires to be so much more than just a tent.

Waterproofed through coatings and additives embedded in the textile's fibres, it will not only be able to withstand the elements, but its designers intend it to generate energy through solar power.

UTS professor of Spatial Design and leader of the Architextile project, Benedict Anderson explained that the shelter is primarily aimed

at "natural disaster relief, war zones and commercial applications."

Architextile is currently being funded by an ATN-DAAD (Germanic Academic Exchange Service) Joint Research Co-operation Scheme grant and incorporates expertise from UTS, CSIRO and University of the Arts Berlin. Each member of the project has a different area of focus in textile fabrication: fibres and yarns, weave structures and 3D architectural modelling.

UTS senior lecturer in Architecture and advanced modeling expert David Pigram has been tasked with the 3D modelling component.

"Textiles in architecture has been around for decades – we've seen flowing sails in building design for many years," said Pigram.

"However, recent advances mean the prospect of using textiles as the primary construction material is now within our reach."

Ebba Walldör, the textile specialist from the University of the Arts Berlin hopes to answer questions regarding what materials should be used to create a fabric that's suitably breathable, insulating, waterproofed and can also support conducting threads. Yet it's the specific premise of the project that interests Walldör most.

"From a textile perspective this project is very intriguing," she said. "The possibility to turn a two-dimensional textile into a three-dimensional shape in the manufacturing process opens up new ways of thinking about surface in relation to form. The limitations of conventional machines are a challenge however – most knitting machines, for example, are built to make garments, not houses."

CSIRO materials scientist Dr Louis Kyratzis provides a key element to the project: he has already developed the flexible battery and solar panels that will be required for the eventual shelter to generate its own light and potentially even power devices.

Currently, the Architextile project aspires to have a prototype measuring three square metres ready by the end of this year, yet even its leader admits the old-fashioned tent is unlikely to become superseded anytime soon.

"Dropping a canvas tent is always going to be cheaper, but the way this project allows such seamless integration with technology opens up so many more applications. Not only do we have a structure that's self-sustaining, constructing it from textiles offers a zero waste production process while maximising flexibility."

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SCROGGIN

Australian tourist hospitalised by bison

A 62-year-old man was taken to hospital after being tossed into the air three times by a bison during a visit to Yellowstone National Park in the US. Officials said the bison had charged the man as he took photos just a few metres away, but it may not have been entirely his fault. According to a Yellowstone spokesperson, a crowd of people had gathered around the animal and it was in a state of agitation by the time the man began to take photos of it. It is understood the injuries he sustained were not life threatening.

Inspirational athlete to paddle Murray River

David Jacka, who was awarded an Order of Australia Medal this June, has announced plans to paddle the Murray River from source to sea, a trip of some 2200 kilometres, despite having high-level quadriplegia. Jacka has not only represented Australia in wheelchair rugby during the Atlanta Paralympic Games, he's also a founding member of the Physically Challenged Shooters' Club of Victoria and, in 2013, he became the first person with quadriplegia to fly solo around the coast of Australia. Jacka plans to embark on his Murray River expedition next March.

Entrepreneur and adventurer to take on Abbott

Businessman and record-setting aviator Dick Smith announced he may be forced to stand against Tony Abbott in the Sydney seat of Warringah if the government doesn't take action to reform the aviation sector. Smith, who was previously the head of the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), said that Australia should be employing modern radar systems at low altitude to guide aircraft, a system that is prevalent in the US, Canada and in Europe.

First stage of Grampians Peak Trail opens

In May, Victorian premier Daniel Andrews officially opened stage one of the Grampians Peak Trail in Halls Gap, with plans for the full walking track to be completed by 2019. As such, the first stage of the track only accounts for 10 per cent of the proposed 13-day experience that has so far received \$29 million in state and Commonwealth funding.

UNESCO raises concerns over Tassie draft management plan

UNESCO's World Heritage Committee has urged that the proposed Tasmanian World Heritage Area management plan be changed to rule out the possibility of mining and logging to take place within its borders. It has also highlighted concerns that the plan contains no clear identification of the area's cultural value and recommended a mission of international experts be invited to review and provide advice for a survey, as well as to propose suitable revisions to the draft management plan before it is finalised.

Moreland City Council opens 'Pop Up Park'

A park featuring a three-metre-high bouldering wall opened in Brunswick outside Melbourne this June following a period of consultation and development undertaken by the Moreland City Council. The construction of the park began in February this year with the climbing wall itself installed on May 14. Situated on Wilson Avenue, the project was allocated \$760,000 in funding and 94 per cent of submissions supported its establishment as a permanent feature. The suburbs north of Melbourne are expected to become home to two more climbing gyms over the next few years.

THE SCIENCE **ACR** OF SURVIVAL

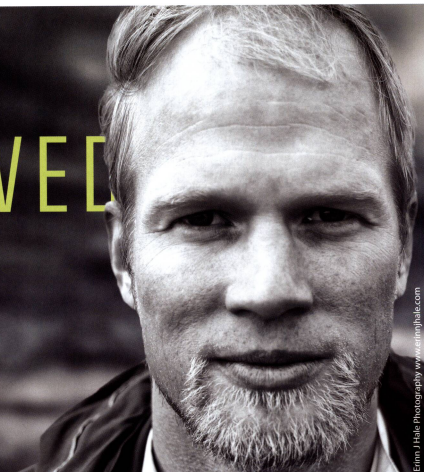
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Erinn J Hale Photography www.erinjhale.com

Woolly-headed dampiera *Dampiera eriocephala*

In his spare time, after revolutionising our understanding of the natural world through his theory of evolution by natural selection, Charles Darwin was a brilliant and dedicated naturalist. Throughout his life he was fascinated by how organisms, ranging from rare Madagascan orchids to the worms in his garden, lived their lives and ultimately, evolved. But brilliant though he was, to the end of his life he remained stumped by the Australian plant family Goodeniaceae. The Goodeniaceae is a characteristic Australian family. A small number of species in one genus (*Scaevola*) have dispersed around warm parts of the world, including Hawaii and the Caribbean, but 360 of the 400 known species in the family are only found in Australia. The main genera are *Goodenia*, *Scaevola*, *Dampiera* (pictured) and *Lachenalia*, with half-a-dozen smaller genera. Most species and most genera occur in Western Australia, although at least some members of the family can be found in most parts of Australia.

All members of Goodeniaceae share a fascinating structure, the 'indusium', which plays an important and unusual role in pollination and makes the family immediately recognisable. The indusium is a cup-shaped structure at the end of the style, usually furnished with a brush of hairs around the rim (a bit like the end of a vacuum-cleaner brush nozzle) as well as on its back. Before the flowerbud opens, pollen from the anthers is deposited into the indusial cup, after which the stamens wither and play no further role in pollination. The indusium in open flowers is positioned so as to deposit a dab of pollen onto the back of a visiting insect probing for nectar. When the flower is a few days old, the stigma (the tip of the style inside the indusium, and the only part of the flower that can receive pollen for fertilisation of the immature seeds) expands and grows out of the indusial cup, pushing away any remaining pollen. The now-receptive stigma is now in exactly the right position to pick up pollen dabbed onto an insect by a previous flower. It's a beautiful and elegant way to maximise the chances of cross-pollination.

In 1860, Darwin wrote to his close friend and botanist at Kew Gardens, Joseph Hooker, that 'the Goodeniaceae have weighed like an incubus for years on my soul'. Darwin was bothered by the Goodeniaceae precisely because of its unusual pollination mechanism. He believed that in the species he grew and studied, the close contact of the stigma with the pollen from the same flower meant that plants would always self-pollinate, something that he thought caused problems for his evolutionary theory. He was wrong, but an understanding of why (genetic self-incompatibility) would not be understood until many years after his death.

A particularly handsome example of *Dampiera* is the woolly-headed dampiera (*D. eriocephala*). This species is common growing in sandy soils in drier inland parts of Western Australia. It may be recognised by its pale to dark blue flowers in distinct heads and neat, tufted habit. Like other species of *Dampiera*, the indusium is held tightly in complex, ear-shaped folds of two of the petals, called auricles. Nobody quite knows why *Dampiera* species have auricles while, for example, most species of *Goodenia* and all



Photographer Dale Grant writes: 'I took this photo during a day walk on Mt Trio in the Stirling Ranges, Western Australia.'

species of *Scaevola* lack them. In *Dampiera* the auricles tightly clasp the indusium, only releasing it when forced apart by a strong pollinator, usually a bee. The auricles probably limit the number of insects that are able to successfully pollinate the flower, thus ensuring that no pollen is wasted on unsuitable visitors. Over a century and a half after Darwin, the Goodeniaceae continue to intrigue botanists and wildflower-lovers alike. New species in the family are regularly discovered, throughout Australia and particularly in Western Australia. Darwin's insights into evolution have helped researchers at the Western Australian Herbarium and in the USA unravel the evolutionary history of the family and construct the first ever detailed phylogeny (family tree) of the genera and species. This has revealed some surprises. For example, some small genera such as *Velleia* and *Vernauxia* that appear very distinctive are not separate genera at all, but are nested inside the large genus *Goodenia*. Understanding the history of the genus is also helping researchers unravel the evolution and genetic basis of the striking range of different flower forms and colours in the family. The Goodeniaceae fascinated Darwin, and continues to fascinate today.



www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/wa-herbarium



Kevin Thiele

Kevin Thiele is a botanist and curator of the Western Australian Herbarium. His expertise includes plant systematics, biodiversity informatics and conservation ecology.

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Bob Brown's green living

As the days shorten, Australians may be beginning to wonder what will remain of winter in the years ahead, writes Bob Brown

Winter is the anchoring season. From it buds the spring, burns the summer and baulks the next reticent autumn. It is winter that we may most regret losing to global warming.

Already the glaciers and snows are turning to grey water and slush. Where icicles hung from the garden tap there is just a wet patch on the ground. The lace-patterned ice on the pond is missing. Skating has headed indoors. Skiing depends on machines for its snow. And pretty well all the plants on Earth need to migrate further from the equator if they are not to perish.

Speaking of which, the pencil pines unique to Tasmania have their stronghold on the lofty Central Plateau where the British settlers destroyed the Aboriginal people by the 1830s. The Tasmanian emu was shot out by the 1860s and the Tasmanian tiger lasted little longer.

By 1900 some 100,000 sheep and 40,000 cattle had caused havoc with sheet erosion of the plateau's alpine soils and so, in turn, the invading human society collapsed. In the 1960s a vast bushfire ravaged the plateau. The state government paid men from the lowlands one pound a day to fight the fire - and it just kept on breaking out. Those dead white spars in and around the Walls of Jerusalem are pencil pines burnt in this man-made disaster.

However, a nobly prescient head of the Tasmanian Lands Department in the 1970s then created the Central Plateau Conservation Area and included most of its higher northern parts. This led seamlessly

to the inclusion of the higher plateau, including the Walls of Jerusalem, in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area in 1989 when the Greens won the balance of power. Seamless except that this inclusion was hotly resisted by Premier Michael Field who was trumped by the remarkable federal minister for the environment, Graham Richardson.

It was in the midst of this political drama that, one sleepless moonlit night, I climbed the 1000 metres to the plateau from my home at Liffey to revisit and be reaffirmed by the icy expanse of the prize at stake. There were wombats on the alpine meadow.

The next federal minister, Ros Kelly, agreed with her Tasmanian counterpart to allow shooting of the World Heritage wallabies provided a pup was present in the pack of bloodhounds as this would be an educative experience for the pup.

Whereas, in the winter of 1837, the Great Lake froze over and the blizzard was so severe that piles of the wallabies were left dead of the cold, they now face the heat of shotgun-toting hunters as well as that of global warming. And, like the pencil pines, the buff-coloured variety of these wallabies face elimination because there is nowhere higher or cooler to go.

Sadly, I think the minus 15.3 degrees Celsius that my thermometer recorded on the plateau in 1982 is unlikely to be recorded there again and humanity - at least its nature lovers - faces many winters of our own self-made discontent.



An aerial view of Lake Salome and the Walls of Jerusalem in 1974. Photo: Bob Brown



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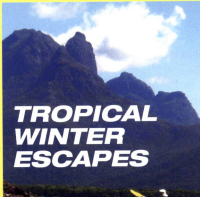
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Q&A: Gary Wells, chief executive of the Nature Conservation Trust



Gary Wells, CEO of the Nature Conservation Trust

What is the Nature Conservation Trust (NCT)?

The organisation was created by statute, but we're not strictly beholden to the government of the day. We're a quasi-private entity with an independent board. The only direction we receive from the government arrives through their approval of the five-year plans that we propose and that are designed around protection of important biodiversity. Our goals reflect the government's priorities but we are left to get on with the job of protecting private land.

What are those goals and how are they achieved?

Our current goal is to protect 50,000 hectares of private land across NSW in order to sustain biodiversity processes and stem the loss of

native wildlife and ecosystems. We achieve this by inviting private landholders to place Trust Agreements (TAs) on their land that assist the landholder to effectively manage the biodiversity on the property. In some cases we also provide education and assistance to improve the quality of certain sites, particularly if they're deemed to be of high conservation value.

How does the NCT balance the conservation and legal nature of its work?

One of our biggest challenges lies in working with private landholders to purchase properties before reselling them with a TA attached. That requires us to find properties with a high conservation value, but are also on the market

and can be purchased and sold on for a justifiable price. We aim to maintain our capital fund, so it's not just balancing legal and conservation thinking, but real estate nous as well. To do this, we employ ecologists and people with real estate backgrounds, and it's fair to say there's a healthy tension that exists between them. Everyone puts his or her best foot forward in order to ensure we maintain the sustainable nature of our business.

How did you come to lead an integral, statewide conservation initiative?

My background is in law and I worked with firms such as Deloitte and Ernst & Young throughout the late eighties and early nineties but I eventually had a tree change and moved to my wife's farm in Wagga. It was there that I became interested in biodiversity and land management, going on to become involved with several regional developments while also running the farm. Biodiversity management was very much just an interest of mine until I came to work for the trust around two years ago.

Do you believe the work of the NCT is paramount to the success of conservation in NSW?

No, I believe that we're simply one of many useful organisations that all have a role to play in ensuring the biodiversity of the state and the country. We need to all work together, regardless of whether we're talking about individuals or organisations, public or private. I personally think it's the private landholders that choose to work with us that are the true heroes of the conservation movement, as they're willing to dedicate part of their land and their lives to the conservation of our native species.

Guillotine: RET decision imminent

In May this year, the coalition government struck a deal with Labor to reduce the renewable energy target (RET), while also including provisions to redefine the burning of native forest 'waste' as a renewable energy source.

At the time of writing, Australia awaits the outcome of a vote in the senate that will decide whether these changes take place. It may be that by the time this article is read, the safety of our forests continues to hang in the balance, or has been dashed altogether.

The issue is acute, as while the proposed changes to the RET will stipulate 'waste' from native forests may be burnt, this is a significant weakening of protections for a forestry system that is already in a state of severe decline.

Frances Pike, an environmentalist and contributor, has repeatedly voiced concerns that these moves will only serve to stimulate logging across the country and accelerate the decline of native species.

'If this logging continues or intensifies it will not only kill millions of individual animals and drive to extinction already threatened forest dependent species of the national public forest estate,' Pike wrote in May. 'It will drastically limit the genetic pool strength of the forest dependent wildlife of nature reserves and national parks.'

Yet there may be more to the story than appears on the surface, with several commentators highlighting the wood waste amendment may be used by certain interests to act as a 'Trojan

Horse' in order to undermine the RET legislation overall.

Lisa Cox, writing for Fairfax, as singled out senators David Leyonhjelm, Bob Day and John Madigan as being extremely hostile to wind energy and may be seeking to use the wood amendments to introduce other amendments pertaining to wind power. Senator Day has also made his position abundantly clear in a letter to federal environment minister Greg Hunt, writing: 'the Renewable Energy Target scheme should never have been enacted.'

It now seems unlikely that Labor will be able to extricate the wood waste amendments while maintaining the integrity of the scheme as a whole.

Woodchips

The Orange-bellied parrot



Orange-bellied parrot recovery setback

The critically endangered orange-bellied parrot population that appeared to have a significant boost late last year may now be in even greater risk of collapse. Of an estimated 30 individuals born during the last breeding season in Tasmania, 19 have contracted beak and feather disease. As juveniles, parrots are more vulnerable to dying as a result of the illness and it's believed 14 of the 19 diseased birds have perished. With a population of less than 60 adults left in the wild, this species is left acutely vulnerable to extinction.

NSW discusses AWC partnership

In June, NSW environment minister Mark Speakman announced the state government would enter negotiations with the Australian Wildlife Conservancy (AWC) to establish cat and fox-free areas in a number of NSW National Parks. The AWC also proposes to engage in land management and scientific activities in those areas. Most importantly, following the establishment of the feral-free zones, reintroductions of species including the bridled nailtail wallaby, the brush-tailed bettong, the western-barred bandicoot and the western quoll will also be initiated.

Queensland to ban plastic bags

Queensland's environment minister Steven Miles has announced his intention to introduce legislation next year that will ban single-use plastic bags. The measure responds to increasing evidence of plastic working its way into the food chain. For example, 40 per cent of small sea turtles in Moreton Bay were found to have eaten plastic. The new laws may also include scope to charge for the use of plastic bags and offer refunds for plastic bottles.

Australian shorebirds critically endangered

The sickle-billed eastern curlew and the curlew sandpiper are the first shorebirds to be listed as critically endangered following massive population decline in recent years.

In Tasmania, the furthest reach of the migratory route known as the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, 90 per cent of curlews and 100 per cent of curlew sandpipers have disappeared. Across the country, both species have suffered a decline of more than 80 per cent in just three generations. Destruction of habitat is listed as the primary cause of the losses.

Researchers warn of new invader

Papua New Guinea's climbing perch fish has been labelled a potential threat to Australia's native bird and fish species after researchers discovered it infesting the waterways of two Torres Strait islands. James Cook University scientists say the freshwater fish is of particular concern due to a combination of unique traits: not only can it survive several days out of water with the use of lungs, it can also 'walk' by manipulating its spiny gill covers. Researchers are now working with fisherman to ensure they can recognise and prevent the spread of the species.

Breweries weigh in to climate debate

42 breweries across the globe, including Guinness, have signed the Climate Declaration, which urges policymakers to recognise the economic opportunities available in taking on climate change. The Brewery Climate Declaration calls attention to specific risks and opportunities pertaining to climate change in the beer production industry. In short, the taste and availability of beer may decline in the not-too-distant future.

NSW apiarists flag "unsustainable" prices

An online auction of apiary sites in May that was undertaken by the Forestry Corporation of NSW saw average prices rise to \$1311 per year. The reaction from beekeepers has been overwhelmingly negative, citing the rising costs would lead to further declines in the industry, which in turn may lead to knock-on effects in agriculture and beyond.

G7 achieves end-to-emissions deadline

In June, G7 nations (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the USA) agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by between 40 and 70 per cent by 2050. This has generally been regarded as good news, however experts highlight strengthening energy alternatives as having a marked effect on the use of greenhouse-gas-emitting fuels. New research has also shown that China's own emissions may peak by 2025, five years earlier than previously thought.

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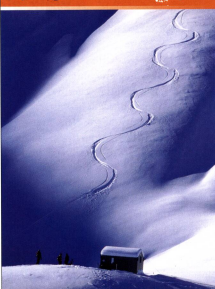


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Turn, turn, turn

Indulging his contemplative mood, *Quentin Chester* finds a walk along the beach stirs up a wealth of memories

When I walked to the river this morning everything had changed. The water was up – way up. By some miracle it had risen overnight by about a metre. Black swans were able to paddle right up to the causeway track we cross to get to town. In the glancing light the paperbarks were silvery fresh and the breeze carried the sound of calling frogs and water lapping at branches. Out of the corner of my eye I even spotted two ospreys lifting off and flapping towards the coast.

For months our little Kangaroo Island estuary had been slumped down, a starved canal of a thing with dried banks of samphire. Every time I went for a wander among the trees the place felt like an abandoned stage. Interesting in a way, but also a bit drowsy and with hardly a bird in sight. Now, with the river brim-full, it's like surfacing from a dream. The air is moist again and the other half of the year has arrived.

For me, there are pretty much two seasons here. We're talking brown and green. Autumn is more like the nice slow fade-out of the

tawny time. Yes there's a bit of relief from heat but everything is on hold, a tad drab and often hanging out for a drink. By late April however, the place flicks to verdant mode. Just a little rain will do it and in a week or two the island is made over. Like some snappy costume change, paddocks and scrub are suddenly velvety with emerald new growth. That's how it rolls until mid-November when the sun sits high and pastures begin to parch and bleach all over again.

If you live on an island then summer is the easiest sell in the world. Sun, surf, lounging on the beach, catching a feed of whiting, dreamy nights on the deck or maybe a snog in the dunes – it's all happening. What's not to like? Well, for starters, how about everything else? We're talking days of blowies and dust, jittery snakes, plus the sweat, salt and all that greasy sunblock. There's the deathly, blinding hush of the noontime heat, as the sun hits hard and nothing stirs. Your favourite beach crawling with visitors. Or worse still, the possibility of some numb-nut accidentally

setting fire to half the island. Summer? You can keep it.

No, give me the solitude of mid-year, the clean air and soft, oblique light. Winter (aka green time) brings a squally blast of energy to the island. It's like a perky new beginning. With the rains come pasture and wildlife. There's the cosseted feel of being tucked indoors beside the wood fire with wafts of eucalyptus smoke and rain chortling along the gutters to fill the tank. South-westerly breezes help us to eavesdrop on conversations from the big lagoon: the windborne sounds of swan parents honking away, lambs and ewes calling, plus creaking flocks of yellow-tailed black cockatoos.

It's also the walking season, when the beach sand is firm underfoot and you've got big sky shows – rainbows and floating towers of puffy cloud. At boot level in the mallee thickets there are damp, earthy aromas as well as plump new fungi and lichens with maybe a splash of orchid as well. This morning, as I strolled downstream, the overnight showers had done their magic. All the bark colours had their wet lustre and

the cobwebs were blinged up with sparkly droplets of moisture.

We'd had light rain overnight but nowhere near enough to lift the estuary by a metre. Closer to the coast, among the flooded groves of paperbarks, I spotted rafts of sea foam. These big frothy cappuccino-style lumps gave the game away. The rising waters pumped in on a monster overnight tide that busted through the sand bar at the mouth of the river. As a result a few gigalitres of ocean complete with gobs of foam - and maybe the osprey's breakfast - came shooting upstream.

I kept on walking through the dunes to the bay. Even though this was the same track I'd been following all summer and shrubbery was more or less unchanged, the place had a different feel. There were no footprints for a start, and in the mellow light the coastal rosemary and acacia showed shades and textures you'd be hard pressed to make out in the blazing January glare. Wrens and silver eyes were nattering away in the depths of the bushes. Best of all the briny air had those ozone whiffs you get from a fresh oyster shell.

Out on the Antechamber Bay beach the water's edge was heaped with tousled mounds of sea grass dumped by the storms and king tides. A pod of six or seven dolphins passed by just offshore. Then a pair of pelicans rounded Cape Coutts and with one of their effortless low glides made a long approach to land at the river mouth. I was alone with the birds on five kilometres of untouched sand. Nearby farms notwithstanding, this remains a forcefully natural place. Now the yachts and holiday types are gone and the green season is doing its thing, the bay and its rhythms feel restored.

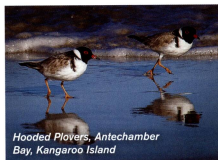
I stepped out, heading east along the beach. In the far distance there were a couple of relic posts standing in the breaking waves,

the remains of an old jetty taken down in the 1970s. For generations small coastal cutters had tied up here to collect wool bales and bags of grain. Now the posts are markers in time, as well as favourite perches for pacific gulls.

The Lashmar family started farming at Antechamber Bay in 1858. At one time they owned ten square miles at this end of the island. They even had their own boat for carting freight - the Free Selector. Diverse and inventive, this was the kind of mob that did more than just sow crops and chase sheep. They were also wedded to the nature of the place. Allen Lashmar, for instance, was a mad keen birdwatcher. On weekends he'd bundle the family into their Morris Truck on the promise of a beach adventure to some remote corner of the island. In truth he was sussing out new places to spot birds.

Mind you, the bay Allen called home, with its shoreline and wetlands, was a birdwatching bonanza. An avid observer he built the platform of ornithological info about the island. Walking the bush and beach here you don't have to look too hard to see the unflagging inspiration the place gave. And that legacy kicks on.

A few nights ago I travelled to the Kingscote Town Hall for the launch of a new photographic field guide: *Birds of Kangaroo Island*. At 578 pages in full colour it's a



Hooded Plovers, Antechamber Bay, Kangaroo Island

beautiful, sumptuous, heartfelt lump of a book written by a bloke called Chris Baxter. Not the Wild founder, but another Kangaroo Island farm boy. He grew up surrounded by the vast sweep of bush on the western end of the island. A former park ranger, Chris is now a tour guide and KI's bird watcher extraordinaire.

In our hyper age of data overload a book like this does things that no app or puffing online engine can hope to achieve. More than a handy reference, in its scope and gathered wisdom the guide is a landmark for the nature of the island. By showing what's here it further drives the need to guard and cherish all that remains. For in the end there's nothing like the heft of book. It's the power of knowledge - the beauty of truth - right there in your hand.

These birdsos are a close-knit bunch. Chris Baxter dedicated *Birds of Kangaroo Island* to the memory of Allen Lashmar and his work. Walking the empty beach this morning, I thought about these farm boys and their birds and the long green-time nights writing up notes and observations. What it must be like to have a lifetime in tune with every twitch of the year. To know the season by the colour of plumage, the call of nestlings or a beach suddenly dotted by waders lobbing in from Siberia.

I'll never have that knowledge - not in a million years. But I like the power of this intimacy. And I like the idea that people can be like a book, tied together by place, a long history and a shared love.

I do also like an empty beach. Through summer this place, though hardly crowded, does get a bit busy at times with people fishing and swimming, boats being launched and kids and dogs running amok. Harmless stuff mostly. Yet if you walk down towards the old jetty during summer you will see nest boxes tucked in the sand at the head of the beach. Allen Lashmar's son Wren puts them there every year to help breeding hooded plovers to raise their youngsters.

I like that too. I get to spend a lot time down here on the sand in winter, walking beside the waves. My thing now is taking photos. That's the main way I connect with people on the island. Mostly they're landscape pics but I do snap a bit of wildlife too. As it happens one of these photos ended up in *Birds of Kangaroo Island*. It shows a pair of hoodies skipping along the beach here at Antechamber.

And that's how it goes I guess. By dint of a carefully placed nest box, a tiny pair of birds and a single photo you get bound into a place and another chapter in the story. **W**




Seafoam incursion, Chapman River, Kangaroo Island
Photos: Quentin Chester

A contributor since *Wild* issue 3, Quentin Chester is the author of several books about wild places.
quentinchester.com



Fog & steam

*Walkers traverse the geothermal landscape of Hjallabak
Nature Reserve on the Laugavegur Trail. Photos: Ian Brown*



Iceland may be subjected to extreme weather conditions, but as *Ian Brown* discovers, the landscape gives true meaning to the word 'awesome'

At last: a sunlit world. The previous five days on the track have been a swirl of drizzle, rain, fog and stormy skies, even a 'hurricane'. Now, as the track leads out of the valley, bursts of sun poke through the dispersing cloud and shine warmly on my head. Beside the path, scrub still dripping with overnight rain is set a sparkling: prostrate junipers and knee-high thickets of stone brambles, ferns and bilberries. I climb steadily, bursting with the joy of an expanding panorama, making for a pass some 800 metres higher. I'm on the final stage of an 85-kilometre walk through the southern highlands of Iceland. Behind me is the famous Laugavegur trail which connects Landmannaalundur to Þórsörk. Ahead, the Fimmyrðuháls track crosses the low point separating two sprawling, ice-capped volcanoes before descending to the coast at Skógar. The track sidles steeply below black fumes, pulling away from the highest of the stunted birch trees until it emerges

on the tundra ridge-crest. Cloud is lifting off the icecaps, revealing Eyjafjallajökull's northern icefall: blue, shattered across the jagged ravine of Strakagil, painted in stripes of vivid green moss and bible black, a labyrinth of gulch, pinnacle and crag – terrain that rejects any thought of access. It's difficult to exaggerate the drama and rich colour palette of Iceland's landscape, created by volcanic and glacial forces that belittle us humans. I can't wait to see more, and stride along the airy ridgeline into the sky. Just an hour later I'm wondering what the hell I'm doing here, as I duck my head down against the blasting rain and dive into a small gully scoured from deep layers of ash, forced to a freezing halt by the abrupt onset of a North Atlantic storm. Raindrops turn to flicks of snow as I grit my teeth, turn my back to the gale and strip down, adding more layers under my waterproofs. Back on the exposed ridge, a balaclava and cinched-up parka hood are not enough to keep the driven prickles of ice from

stinging my face. Gloved hands are turning numb as they work my trekking poles. Snow turns back to sleet, then rain, and back to snow again, swirling and buffeting me this way and that. My surroundings are intermittently visible: a wasteland of freshly-piled lava in shades of black, occasionally red, all fading into grey. There is no shelter, not one speck of green. It reminds me of a slagheap, so alien yet darkly beautiful, frightening in its intensity and lifelessness. The lava texture is like froth with the bubbles gone. Any misstep could cause a lot of damage. I focus on placing my feet among the rocks, head down, balancing with my poles, glancing sideways to pick up the next track marker. I can't keep warm unless I move, fast. I push on as hard as I can. On easy bits I'm almost running, thrusting with the poles. A thought floats to the surface: "maybe I should turn back." Then I see a flash of colour. It's a sign

about the 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull. I can only just read the headlines through streaming eyes. So I'm walking across a four-year-old lava field – no wonder the route is so ill formed. But this is good news: it can't be far to the pass, and the hut. Any thought of a spectacular campsite for my last night has been blown away by the storm. I want that hut.

With only a week there, I decided to pick one good walk rather than flit all over the place. The 55-kilometre Laugavegurinn is Iceland's longest and most popular extended track. This proved an excellent choice for a powerful experience.

I caught the bus that runs to both ends of the track every day through the two-month season. We passed the black dome of Hekla (1491 metres), Iceland's most notorious volcano. It was hulked down, gathering dark clouds over itself, brewing another eruption. Standing like a gateway into the mountains, it was once known as the portal to Hell. Hekla has spewed out 13 cubic kilometres of ash and lava in the last thousand years – not a bad contribution to Iceland's growth. Then the bus threaded through blocky lava on a track that looked as if it had only recently been scraped by a bulldozer. Maybe

it had; this is a restless land straddling the mid-Atlantic Ridge, still being thrown together by spreading crust and spilled lava, moulded by ice, tempest, earthquake and flood.

It was lunchtime when the bus arrived in Landmannalaugur ('Hot Springs Pool') and disgorged us into the sudden cold of the highlands. The steaming pool beckoned, but I didn't linger. In peak times up to 80 walkers start each day on the Laugavegur (loosely translated as 'Hot Springs Way'), but the end of August is also the end of the summer. Bus transport would shut down in just a few days. So I strode off with only a few dozen others towards the first campsite and hut. We were soon dispersed along the track, mixing with throngs of day-walkers on a maze of shorter loop-tracks. As the main track led across the Laugahraun ('Hot Springs Lavafield') and climbed onto Brennisteinsalda mountain, I was excited straight away to see small lava caves and new (for me) alpine flowers, then sulphur-stinking fumaroles steaming from technicolour hillsides.

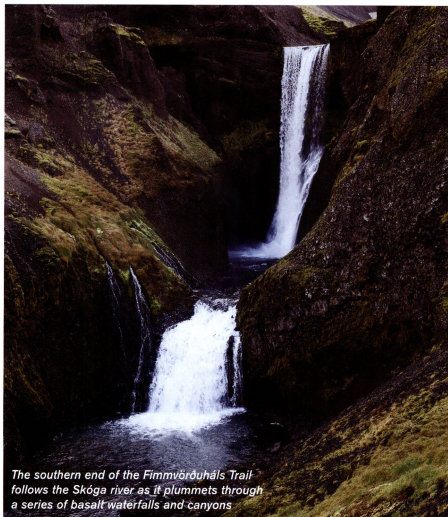
The first part of the Laugavegurinn traverses Fjallabak Nature Reserve, established in 1979 to protect the most active geothermal field in Iceland. The key feature is an old caldera

filled with rhyolite (which weathers to orange gravel), almost circular, up to 20 kilometres across, and chock full of hot springs, fumaroles, rounded mountains, ravines and waterfalls. In any direction you can see steam pumping from orange slopes striped with vibrant green moss and filthy vestiges of winter snow.

The area is so geothermally active because it sits directly on the rift zone where the North American and European crustal plates are parting ways. New crust is welling up from below, bringing the molten netherworld disturbingly close to the surface. This exposes the nature reserve to the eternal threat of industrialisation. All of Iceland's electricity comes from geothermal and hydro sources. Parts of the highlands are laced with hydro dams and transmission lines. Geothermal developers have their eyes on Fjallabak.

Apparently some of the Fjallabak Mountains are ice-capped, but I never saw them – so much for claiming a few easy summits. As I climbed onto the 1000-metre-high plateau, the temperature fell and cloud moved in with a cold breeze. Dark, looming pinnacles of basalt hung over the track, breathing wisps of fog and steam. It's easy to see how trolls came to feature in the folk traditions of this strange land. These days Iceland is an odd mix of stark modernity and ancient traditions reaching back to The Settlement (874 AD), when Vikings came to stay. I was a few kilometres from the hut at Hrafninnuskur ('Obsidian Peak'), trudging across gravelly snowfields and skirting the unseen mountain of Soðull (1122 metres), when the drizzle set in. The last stretch was through a field of glimmering obsidian (black volcanic glass). As an Australian, a child of some of the oldest land on Earth, it was disarming to read that this lavafield dates from the eruption of 871 AD, or that some mountain popped up 538 years ago. I walked down the barren slope below the hut to find a sort of Neolithic village. All available rocks had been gathered up to build protective walls around dozens of tent sites. Way above the treeline, there is no other shelter.

The hut and many of the campsites were soon full of wet and bedraggled trail refugees. Loath to part with the A\$70-a-night hut fee, I pitched my 'travelling light' fly in a stone enclosure. There was neither a toilet nor a working water supply in the campsite, and our tribe of skinflints had to walk up to use the hut facilities. Even though it crosses two nature reserves, the Laugavegurinn is managed by an 84-year-old community organisation – the Iceland Touring Association – with minimal government input. Day length at the end of August is about 15 hours, similar to Tasmania in high summer. In the cold



The southern end of the Fimmvörðuháls Trail follows the Skóga river as it plummets through a series of basalt waterfalls and canyons



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drizzle, it was either keep moving or get into the sleeping bag, so I wandered about with my camera until it was nearly dark. Walkers were still drifting in.

The second day was just as cold and bleak. I joined the line of walkers trooping across the rolling plateau with its many gulches to the next hut at Álfvatn ('Swan Lake'), but was soon left behind as I dawdled to photograph amazing colours, snow caves and mossy banks through the fog. Hot springs provided warm spots to rest. After six kilometres the edge of the rhyolite plateau came abruptly and the fog lifted to reveal the onward,

WALKING IN ICELAND

Unpronounceable place-names make Iceland a confusing place, and limited information don't help. 1.5 times the size of Tasmania, it is mountainous and only sparsely populated. Small patches of lowland forest survive in a landscape dominated by green fields, barren mountains, ash plains, lava fields, lakes and sparse arctic vegetation. Much of the interior is wild and uninhabited. Apart from the Laugavegur, other longer walks include:

- The Snæfell-Lonsoræfi walk crosses mountain country on the north-eastern edge of Vatnajökull National Park, the largest and highest icecap. With lots of side-trips possible, the 42km track can take from 3-7 days.
 - Between the beautiful lake of Mývatn (east of the 'northern capital' of Akureyri) and Vatnajökull lies the Óðadahraun lava field. The five-day, 95km Askja trail traverses Óðadahraun from east to west, crossing a crater lake and mountains at elevations up to 1300m.
 - In the remote Westfjords area (Iceland's northwest peninsula), the Hornstrandir Nature Reserve has a large network of tracks and huts for exploring basalt mountains, fiords, huge seacliffs, seabirds and seals.
- If you want to head off-track, the potential of the coast, mountains and lakes is enormous, limited only by your imagination and access, and sometimes obstructed by glaciers and large rivers.

Ski-touring options are similarly vast... if you want to be adventurous. Most of the island is snow-covered in winter, so access into the mountains can be difficult. Long nights and extreme weather can be expected. Spring is probably the best time for snow sports.

slightly warmer landscape of lava plains, black mountains and greenery laced with streams and lakes. At this point I also passed out of the nature reserve into highland sheep country.

Álfvatn rests in a broad vale, a limpid pool with craggy mountains rising to either side. The twin huts sit exposed on the plain and are accessible by a rough road. I opted again for the campsite, which was soon busy. As the wind rose I wondered what we were in for. The hut warden, a strong-looking woman in her forties, walked down with the news: "A hurricane is coming. Winds will go over 30 metres per second. There will be very much rain. You should go into the old hut." Many did, some stayed. The forecast only got worse. I secured my shelter very low to the ground, which held the pegs strongly. I thought I would ride it out in my bivvy bag, but packed everything else away, ready to run.

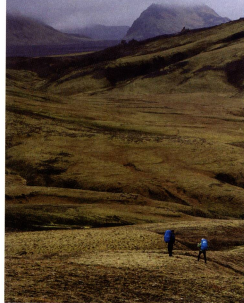
Darkness descended and the storm grew by the hour. The gale swept in like a freight train, bashed the fly with rain and roared off across the lake, rocking me from side to side. I didn't sleep a wink, but was dry and warm. Wobbling torchlight appeared with the warden behind it, again urging me to depart. Every now and then there would be a scuffle of voices as another tent blew down and the occupants scrambled. I was determined to see if I could last the night. At 3.34 am I got my answer. An almighty blast ripped three tie-points off the fly and flung pegs into the blackness. I packed up in a flapping mess, trying not to lose everything to the wind, and moved into the leeward side of the cooking shelter. Only one tent was still standing.

Even in the shelter, I was being lifted off the floor by the wind coming up through the slats. The last tentees surrendered. At first light I too grovelled my way towards the hut. Stuff was flying through the air. A heavy timber picnic table lay flapped and smashed in a puddle. I saw a wheelbarrow tumbling towards the lake. I nearly got blown away myself.

The wind had apparently reached 160 kilometres-per-hour, and my barometer fell to 911 millibars. Most of Iceland's airports had shut down. The hut shuddered on its foundations, jammed full of packs, sodden gear and sleepers – Czechs, Americans, Italians, Britons, Germans, Spaniards, Danes, French, but not a single Icelandic. The warden arranged an evacuation bus and most people happily got on it. In the main hut, 13 remaining walkers gathered. All experienced and with extra time up our sleeves, we resolved to continue when possible, together. The rivers would be flooded, perhaps impassable.

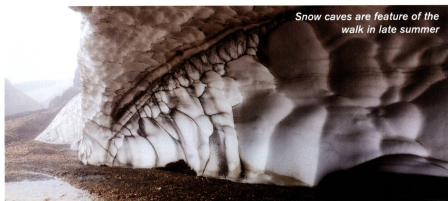
We waited another day, until the flood

abated and the wind reversed, and went for it. Walking to the huts at Emstrur turned out well, across vast gravel plains deposited in catastrophic floods when the ice caps were melted by eruptions, and over raging torrents (via bridges). We also crossed into the new Katla Geopark, protecting a large complex of volcanic and glacial landforms. The weather didn't get really unpleasant until the last hour. The track was almost empty. From the hut I went for a stroll across the plateau to the abrupt gorge of Markarfljót. Astoundingly, this 200 metre deep defile was apparently gouged in a single flood event. Wheeling fulmars haunted the striped walls above massive rapids. Sheep grazed on the ledges. On the fifth day I ambled into the popular holiday valley of Þórsörörk ('Thor's Wood' - another nature reserve) in pleasant, overcast weather, the peaks still shrouded in cloud, and camped with some of my storm-friends who also planned to cross Fimmvörðuháls (Five Cairns Pass). Þórsörörk was another totally different environment, sheltered and wooded. I spent the late afternoon exploring the wet forests of dwarf birch, just starting





Hulking peaks and gloomy weather surrounds Alftavatn



Snow caves are feature of the walk in late summer

to turn yellow. Rain fell gently all night into the first day of autumn.

.....
Leaving the volcano sign, I lurch through the storm and snow and sleet across rolling fields of ash-mud towards Fimnvörðuháls. A battered wooden sign marks the pass. But there is no direction to the hut. I go one way, realise I am heading downhill towards Skógar, and turn back. Markers and plenty of footprints lead off to the east. That must be it. After ten minutes I'm getting nervous, then a square thing looms out of the fog,

perched on a windblown ridge. I can't even find the door. Second time around I see it, barricaded against the coming winter. I climb inside and slam out the weather. All afternoon the hut slowly fills with trekkers in various states of hypothermia, steam and a babel of languages. No one camps. On my last day in Iceland I rise early, hoping to see some of what I missed crossing the eruption and still make the 3 pm bus back to Reykjavik. I step out the door into calm, chilled air. Stars are blinking out as darkness fades. I can see down into the black basin

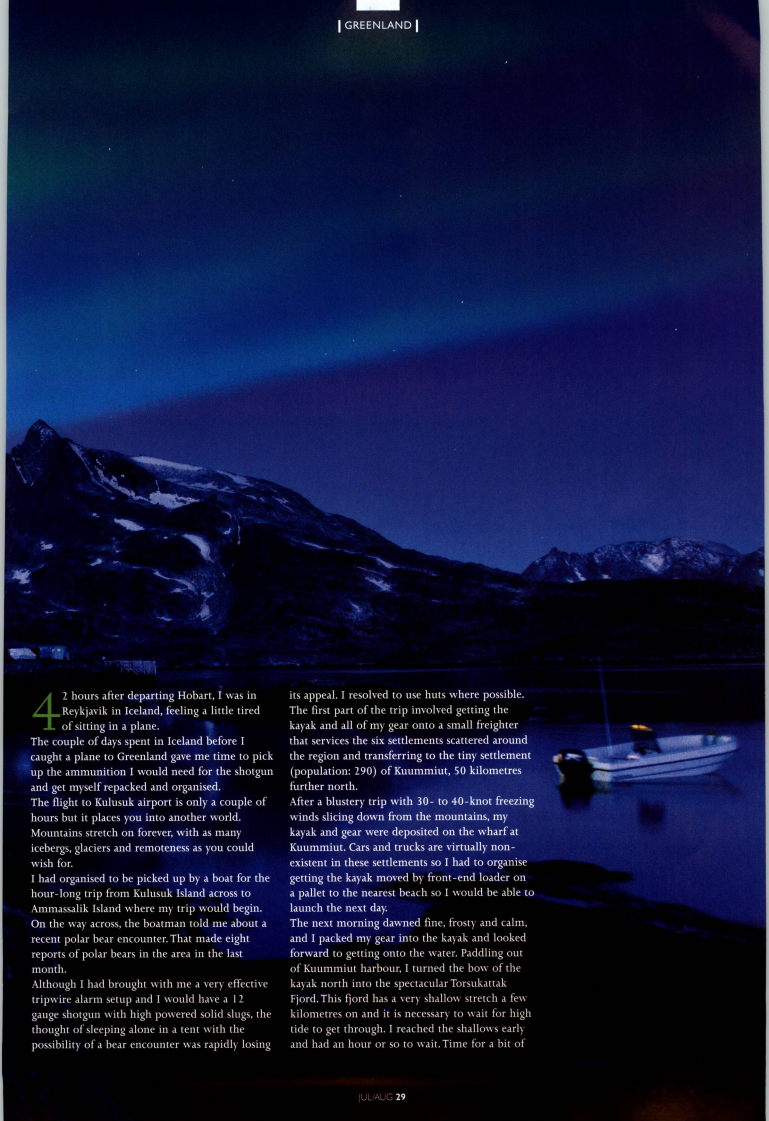
below the hut, threaded with silver-blue melt streams from the glacial dome shining above. The storm has blown out. Heading back along the track, the rain-soaked ashfields are frosted and frozen solid, the walking fast and easy. I reach the volcano sign just as the sun strikes the low pile of Magni, one of the 2010 craters. Orange scoria flames with morning light and steam rises from still-cooling lava. A landscape of ice and fire spreads out all around. It's a gentle 15-kilometre descent under mostly blue skies, following the Skóga river 1000 metres down the slope of this vast volcanic massif, the coastline spread out below. The swelling river cuts progressively through a stack of basalt flows, gouging a series of waterfalls and scary, gothic canyons full of pounding spray, darkness and rainbows. The sense of wildness is lost with vehicle tracks and increasing hordes of day walkers. But these changes just add to the richness of country traversed on this walk. Besides, we who have seen so much more carry this elemental land within us to the road, into town, and away. **W**

POLAR *paddle*

Geoff Murray dodges polar bears in a bid to find a slice of arctic beauty and solitude in Greenland's fjords



Aurora Borealis over Kuummiut and Torsukattak Fjord, Mt Avelaatseq behind. Photos: Geoff Murray



42 hours after departing Hobart, I was in Reykjavik in Iceland, feeling a little tired of sitting in a plane.

The couple of days spent in Iceland before I caught a plane to Greenland gave me time to pick up the ammunition I would need for the shotgun and get myself repacked and organised.

The flight to Kulusuk airport is only a couple of hours but it places you into another world. Mountains stretch on forever, with as many icebergs, glaciers and remoteness as you could wish for.

I had organised to be picked up by a boat for the hour-long trip from Kulusuk Island across to Ammassalik Island where my trip would begin.

On the way across, the boatman told me about a recent polar bear encounter. That made eight reports of polar bears in the area in the last month.

Although I had brought with me a very effective tripwire alarm setup and I would have a 12 gauge shotgun with high powered solid slugs, the thought of sleeping alone in a tent with the possibility of a bear encounter was rapidly losing

its appeal. I resolved to use huts where possible.

The first part of the trip involved getting the kayak and all of my gear onto a small freighter that services the six settlements scattered around the region and transferring to the tiny settlement (population: 290) of Kuummiut, 50 kilometres further north.

After a blustery trip with 30- to 40-knot freezing winds slicing down from the mountains, my kayak and gear were deposited on the wharf at Kuummiut. Cars and trucks are virtually non-existent in these settlements so I had to organise getting the kayak moved by front-end loader on a pallet to the nearest beach so I would be able to launch the next day.

The next morning dawned fine, frosty and calm, and I packed my gear into the kayak and looked forward to getting onto the water. Paddling out of Kuummiut harbour, I turned the bow of the kayak north into the spectacular Torsukattak Fjord. This fjord has a very shallow stretch a few kilometres on and it is necessary to wait for high tide to get through. I reached the shallows early and had an hour or so to wait. Time for a bit of



target practice with the gun. I shot off three normal high-powered cartridges then slipped one of the solid slugs in, just to see if there was much difference. BOOM! Geez. What a kick. What a bang.

Feeling somewhat more confident in the gun, I packed everything away and threaded my way through the slowly filling shallows to the deeper water on the other side.

My destination that day was The Blue Hut, a tiny, one-roomed hut located at the confluence of the Torsukatak, Ikateq and Ikaseq Fjords. A spectacular location, but I knew that the weather was forecast to deteriorate, so this tiny hut was home for at least a couple of days.

The location was remote, cold, and stunning. Huge icebergs drifted past, the

surrounding mountains pierced the sky and the silence was absolute.

The next day was not a day to be on the water, so I decided to go for a wander around the area. With my camera, lenses and a bite of food in a daypack, a pocketful full of cartridges and the shotgun under my arm, I headed off.

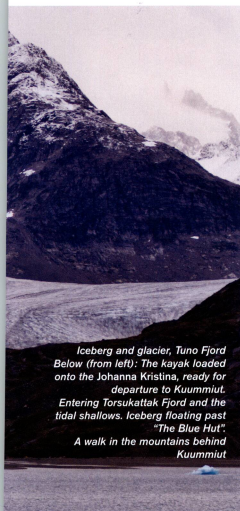
I hadn't gone more than a couple of kilometres when I came to a smooth slab of rock. Stepping onto it, my foot slipped and I hit the ground.

Even though I am 57 years old, I still bounce pretty well and I wasn't too worried, until I looked at my left index finger. It had been squashed between the rock and the shotgun when I fell over and the finger had been popped open like an overripe apricot.

Looking at it I thought: "That's going to hurt very soon." I headed back to the hut to get some painkillers.

I decided that I needed to have the finger looked at back at the nearest settlement the following day. I couldn't get through the fjord shallows until late afternoon so the next morning I bandaged the finger as best I could and went for a paddle up the Ikateq Fjord.

Conditions were sublime. The mountains were beautiful, the water was oily smooth and the air was crystal clear. I saw a pod of seals off to my left, maybe twenty of them, heads bobbing up and down. Then, much closer to me, about 30 metres away, I saw a black shape sticking out of the water. As I sat in the kayak trying to work out what it was, it started moving towards me. I could see the



Iceberg and glacier, Tuno Fjord
Below (from left): The kayak loaded
onto the Johanna Kristina, ready for
departure to Kuummiut.
Entering Torsukattak Fjord and the
tidal shallows. Iceberg floating past
"The Blue Hut".
A walk in the mountains behind
Kuummiut



same day, most likely the same one that I saw. I was rapt that I had had a bear encounter, but also pleased that it hadn't been too close. Anyway, it was time to head back to the hut, pack my gear and paddle back down to Kuummiut to find some medical treatment. That evening I wandered down to the harbour, enjoying the last light of the day. It was cool, around minus two degrees Celsius and still. Looking up I saw a narrow band of green light stretching across the skies. Hoping that this might be the mystical aurora borealis, I watched quietly. Slowly the band transformed, got brighter and spread across the inky sky above me. For two hours I watched one of the best light shows I have ever seen – silent and dazzling.

I had seen photographs on a local website of a particular fjord not far from Kuummiut that looked quite amazing, so I contacted the Danish teacher in Kuummiut who owned the website. I met the man – Carl – in Kuummiut and he described the fjord to me, telling me of some really nice huts in the fjord. It sounded ideal, so after a couple of days rest (for my finger). I packed my gear and headed off towards the Tasilaq Fjord. Conditions were breezy and a little choppy as I made my way northwest. Finally I came to the mouth of the fjord and as I entered the wind fell away until it was dead calm. I passed some dilapidated huts on my way in and thought "at least I would have a 'nice' hut to stay in." Rounding a corner I was presented with the most beautiful scene. I remember saying to myself, "this is the most beautiful place I have ever been." And it was. The water was a mirror, the air was stunningly clear and the mountains were perfect. Paddling into this dream, I searched for the huts – but there were none. After a while searching without success I emailed Carl through my satellite messenger and asked him where they were. Fortunately, he was in front of his computer and sent me the coordinates of the huts immediately. It was then that I realised where the huts were. They were, in fact, the dilapidated huts I had passed on my way in.

I paddled back to the huts and inspected the first two. They were incredibly dirty, smelly and altogether uninviting. The third hut was up on the hill and looked bigger. It was very scruffy looking on the outside but surprisingly cosy inside, so that was to be home for the night. I had a great evening, reading by candlelight and revelling in the solitude. The next day was my 58th birthday, so I had a swig of whisky, a cherry ripe and wished myself "Happy Birthday." Life was good.

I explored the area the next morning, trying to capture the majesty in front of me with my camera.

Then, around midday, I repacked the kayak ready for the paddle back to Kuummiut. The settlement freighter was due the next day and I wanted to catch it back to Tasilaq. My last day in Kuummiut was wet and misty. In the mid-morning I was walking through the settlement and suddenly I heard sounds of gunfire – masses of it. Shot after shot rang out. Looking in the direction of the sounds I spotted a dozen or so motorboats speeding towards the settlement from the south. It turned out that it was a hunting party that had been out looking for whale. They had killed a huge fin whale and the excitement was absolute as there was enough meat there to feed the village for many months to come. The boats eased into the harbour and excited villagers rushed down to carry up the bags full of whale meat.

My kayak was hoisted onto the settlement freighter, the Johanna Kristina, and the ship steamed south towards Tasilaq. The trouble with Greenland is that there are not enough superlatives to describe it. At times it is an assault on the senses, fabulous, special, intimidating, awe inspiring and beautiful, all at once. [W](#)



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water rippling off either side of it as it approached. It looked about 100 millimetres wide and the thought occurred to me that it might be attached to a rather large body covered in white fur. Not waiting to find out, I turned and headed away from it at full speed for a kilometre or so. I didn't see it again, but a little further north I ran into a yacht load of tourists that had landed to inspect a deserted US army base. The skipper of the yacht informed me that two polar bears had been sighted around the hut I was staying at only two weeks ago. I was later talking to a very experienced German expeditionary that had lived in East Greenland for the last 30 years and he confirmed that it was almost certainly a bear. He informed me that a bear had been sighted just outside Tasilaq Harbour that

Bag PIKIRAI



Aaron basks on schist crumbs following a successful return from the summit. Photos (unless stated otherwise): Ben Armitage

ging KITAH

While New Zealand is renowned for its stunning terrain, mountaineer *Ben Armitage* was particularly lured by the twin peaks of Mount Earnslaw/Pikirakitahi



My desire to climb Mount Earnslaw/Pikikiraitahi began in an instant, when I rounded a corner on the road to Glenorchy and first glimpsed the mountain's majestic form. I was whizzing past Bennett's Bluff where sheer cliffs drop down to Lake Wakatipu providing an immersive view of the submerged ancient glacier and the tall peaks from which it was carved. The towering backdrop to the scene is the twin peaks of Pikikiraitahi; its southern faces covered in a blanket of glacial white that remains throughout the changing seasons. Drivers routinely slam their brakes here before limping into the narrow turnout to catch their breath and snap a few selfies. In the mythology of the Ngai Tahu tribe, Pikikiraitahi was formed when a wedge of pounamu was inserted into the highest peak of the region. This hard green stone was used to make a variety of essential tools including adzes and fishhooks as well as personal adornments. Expeditions would venture from the outlet of Lake Wakatipu, near present day Queenstown, towards outcrops in the Dart Valley. Pikikiraitahi was not only the guardian of the supply, but also a towering guidepost by which to locate the alluring greenstone. Our journey would begin from the same place, but the Ngai Tahu's guidepost was our destination. Joining me on this trip was Enrique, a veteran of several high peaks in the Andes who had recently moved from Western Australia to be reunited with the mountains. We had struck a friendship after meeting through the Queenstown Climbing Club and I had started parking my campervan in his front yard. Also with us was Aaron, who brought valuable local experience to our party. Hailing from the North Island, he had spent the previous season as a warden on the Rees-Dart Track, a four-to-five day tramping track that loops around the Earnslaw Massif.

A LONG APPROACH

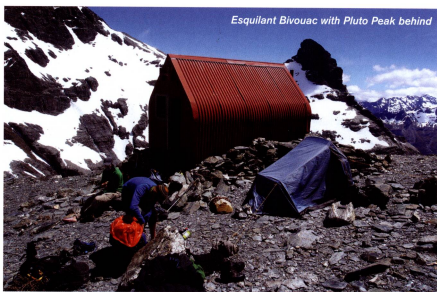
As we left our vehicle at Muddy Creek car park, Aaron quickly offered some choice advice: The tramping tracks bobs up and down as it traverses the Valley's true-left slope; its slow going, he explained, but gives trampers a fighting chance of maintaining dry feet. His preferred option was to follow a 4WD track along the valley floor, which is flat and direct, although the river meanders back and forth across it and we found ourselves wading through thigh deep water. After about eight kilometres, we turned west and navigated electric fences and cattle to find the beginning of the Kea Basin track. Although well maintained, it begins abruptly on the bush edge with no obvious path

leading to it. Upon arrival, a large orange triangle and a Department of Conservation sign indicate its location. Here, the climb begins. The endless switchbacks can do only so much tame the steep slope winding through mountain beech forest, where mosses envelop anything that stays still, and lichens hang like beards from the limbs of trees. Towards the top, we allowed ourselves a breather, a quick detour without packs to see the Earnslaw Hut, which is a simple old timber, and iron structure that has been tastefully restored. I always feel an instinctive attraction to shelters such as these, even if the ostensible purpose of the trip is to encounter the wilderness.

After a further climb, we crossed the tree line – an abrupt shift into alpine tussock and scrub, and where orange track markers cease. Fortunately, a trodden path winds its way around clumps of bastard grass (*Aciphylla colensoi*) whose long, strong blades are sharp enough on the ends to cause injury. The route then emerges onto open pastures of tussock grass (*Chionochloa*) before swinging north and onto a spur with a vista over the waterfalls and hanging glaciers of the Kea Basin. Steadily, the trail becomes less and less defined, braiding out into several options that often diverge and later recombine. After consulting the map to predict the trail's general direction, we began to call our plan for the day into question. Predicting travel times demands experience on similar terrain, something that I did not possess. Back in Australia, I first assume that the ground is flat, and then casually tweak any calculation to account for hills. While this approach has served me well, it was completely inadequate when our route for the day included 1800 metres of rise over just four kilometres.

Knowing all this, I had made sure that we all considered the plan before we set off. Or so I thought. "That's ambitious," Enrique blurted as I pointed out our location on the topographic sheet. Striking camp lower than first planned would have blown out an already long Sunday, and work demands meant we couldn't afford to be out for more than two days. After a late start, our plan was beginning to seem untenable, but nobody wanted to adjust our objective until we absolutely had to. Our decision point was the base of the glacier, where we would either make camp on the spot, or if possible, push on to Esquilant Bivouac Hut and make it before last light, which being nearly midsummer, was around 11 pm.

As we continued on, the track took us past the first of two rock bivouacs in the basin. Both of these, along with thousands more around the country, are marked on the official NZ Topo50 series, with a unique symbol – a very useful feature. For a second time, we briefly indulged in time out from our main plan to poke around a shelter that we had no need to occupy. This particular 'bivvy' boasted a long lip of overhanging rock, at a cosy but practical height, providing comfortable shelter for four people. The natural structure is augmented by a low wall of stacked rocks on the open side, and for a touch of luxury, dry tussock has been collected and piled on the ground for cushion and insulation. Unfortunately, it was too low on the mountain to be useful to us, however, many parties take three or even four days to complete this route, making the bivvies an ideal base camp. Our next stop was at a very large cairn, which happened to be right on the snowline. As we discussed our prospects of reaching the hut before nightfall, a kea (*Nestor notabilis*)

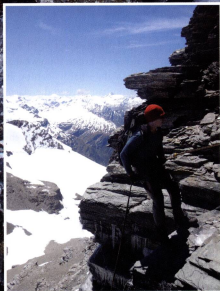




Aaron forms a plan to negotiate crux section of the climb, known as 'The Keyhole'



Earnslaw Hut



*The author rappels The Keyhole.
Photos: Aaron Perks*

joined our conversation with its raucous squawks. To all round relief, we calculated that our rate of ascent had increased markedly since the switchbacks of the forest, and we all agreed to forge on to the hut, though we double-checked that our head torches were handy.

As we rose up the glacier in a diagonal traverse, the setting sun shone through Wright Col. This gap between high peaks is better known to Lord of the Rings buffs as the Redhorn Pass on Caradhras. We had excellent traction in the spring snow so, unlike Frodo, we managed not to slip, nor to spill any of the precious cargo we were carrying.

As we approached Esquilant Bivouac, the setting sun exuded a pink glow across the wild granite country of the Darran Mountains, home to Milford Sound. This view was our reward for carrying overnight packs to within just 400 metres of the summit, and it meant we were on track to claim the summit in the morning.

was the chef's special – just a minor violation of the rule that demands at least four calories per gram for back country foods. As I savoured the fresh taste of vegetable, I decided it was a rule that deserved to be ignored.

After dinner, Aaron headed for the tent, leaving me to happily claim the last available mattress in the hut. One big advantage of staying inside was the warming effect of six breathing bodies in a very small space. The other was the effect of peer-motivation: When alarms started to go off at the agreed time of five am, there was no movement at first. Then, our collective tossing and a few murmurs led to more activity, until eventually all of us were on our feet and getting ready to set off.

Of course, an overseas trip report must include mention of some cultural curiosities and our kiwi commonwealth compatriots need not be exempt. In the land of the long white cloud, there is nothing long at all about the preferred choice of leg wear;

then steepened and as the mountain itself began to expose itself through the crumbly debris, we found ourselves clambering up a series of small ledges. Crampons went on after we encountered verglass, a layer of ice formed by refreezing of the previous day's meltwater. It was more a blessing than a hazard because it helped to hold the loose rock together. October and November are considered the best months for this route because avalanche conditions are generally low risk, while enough snow and ice is present to improve the surface.

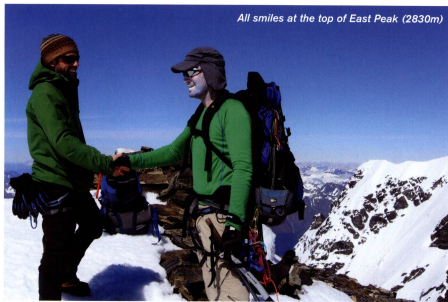
We only roped up at the crux section, known as the keyhole. Here, a large slab of rock had come unstuck from the mountainside, demanding a tight squeeze through and up. For us, the step up was a little higher than usual; a chunk of ice had taken up residence over winter and had gobbled up the fixed line, which would be available for climbers later in the season. As we gained altitude, we traversed a number of snow gullies, until we emerged onto the ridge. Here, we cut our own switchbacks into consolidated snow to complete the final 100 metres of vertical gain. After racing ahead to reach the summit first, Aaron had the camera ready to capture my arrival. When Enrique soon joined us, he posed for a photo beside the summit cairn, making a heart shape with his hands for his wife, who had recently fallen pregnant.

At 2830 metres, it hardly needs saying that the views were panoramic. Looking north along the Southern Alps, we perceived a landscape comprised exclusively of snowy, craggy peaks. The wide green valleys that separate them were hidden from view, giving the impression that they simply didn't exist. In the other direction, we saw the far shores of Lake Wakatipu, in which Queenstown was nestled. To the west, we looked upon the marginally lower west peak, and dreamed of completing the more difficult traverse of both summits. As Nelson Mandela wrote, 'After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb'. The other parties had arrived and left before us, so we had the patch to ourselves. Under bluebird skies, we felt hardly a breath of wind, which created a surreal impression of paradise.

THE RETURN

The descent to Esquilant Bivouac was mostly as straightforward as the way up, although the ice which had cemented much of the choss in place was now beginning to melt, and could no longer be trusted. Aaron negotiated the terrain like a mountain goat, and arrived in the col in time to farewell the other parties. They had taken a slightly different route, up and down a snowy

All smiles at the top of East Peak (2830m)



REACHING THE SUMMIT

The small six-bunk hut is perched at the far end of Wright Col, almost hanging above cliffs hundreds of meters high. It is owned by the New Zealand Alpine Club and costs NZ\$15 per night, paid to the Department of Conservation in Queenstown. Since it can't be booked, spaces are claimed on a first-come-first-served basis.

We were the last of three parties to arrive, so we pitched our tent alongside the hut, nestled within another dry stone wall for wind protection. Aaron and I sat outside to soak up the mountain scenery, while Enrique jumped in his sleeping bag at the first opportunity and our dinner was shared by passing the pot back and forth through the door flap. Noodles with zucchini and tuna

shorts are *de rigueur* in all conditions. I had already become somewhat accustomed to this sight – hardly batting an eyelid when Aaron had crossed the glacier holding an ice axe while baring his knees. In the morning, however, foreign jaws dropped when a *jeune fille* kiwi stepped out into the biting mountain air with tiny shorts that barely extended below her parka. Of course, the day would warm up, and the outfit would prove to be completely practical, but it is an option only for the well acclimatised. As other parties set off, we were left behind melting snow. We had neglected to fill up our water the night before, and the trickle we had been told of the night before was now frozen solid. The day began with a field of talus. The route

couloir, so we hadn't ever crossed paths.

Back on the Birley Glacier, the warm sun had turned yesterday's firm corn snow into a soggy slop. Our trudging gait soon turned to a semi-jog so that gravity could power our descent. As we refined this technique it turned into a carefree playground skip. Our faces were plastered with wide grins as we quickly made our way to the snowline. If a chairlift had been handy, I might have taken it up just to run down again.

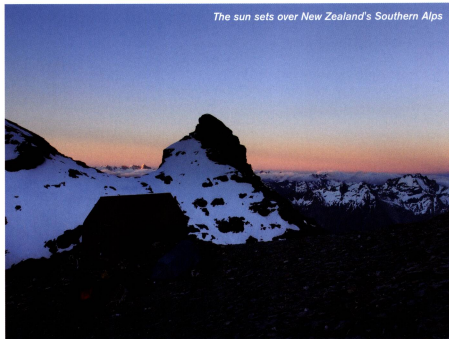
After a further 1300 metres of descent, and a seemingly eternal slog along the flats, we were almost upon the car. "Oli for a beer!" we all thought. "Wait, what's that in Aaron's hand?" To our astonishment, a fly fisherman had pulled over his 4WD and generously offered us part of his evening's supply. Just as generously, Aaron hadn't finished it by the time Enrique and I caught up.

The Southern Alps of New Zealand are packed with peaks to suit every level of experience and commitment. Pihirahitahi/Mount Earnslaw is a classic, and in many ways typical, with its charming, practical hut, and loose, chossy rock. More information about this route and others nearby can be found in *Queenstown: Rock, Ice and Mountains*, as well as *Moirs Guide North* which describes many harder tramping routes, including the approach to Esquilant Bivouac.

This climb is popular throughout the summer, although conditions can be severe and change rapidly at any time of year. All parties should be equipped for alpine travel and prepared to deal with contingencies on their own. If that rules you out, but you still want to go, guides can be contracted from Queenstown and will charge around NZ\$4,400 for a party of two.

In that case, all that is required is good fitness and a dose of enthusiasm.

I have since passed the Bennett's Bluff lookout many more times, and the vista is no less spectacular. To look up at the mountains from the bottom is inspiring, but to have earned the right to see down from the top is truly enriching. **W**



The sun sets over New Zealand's Southern Alps

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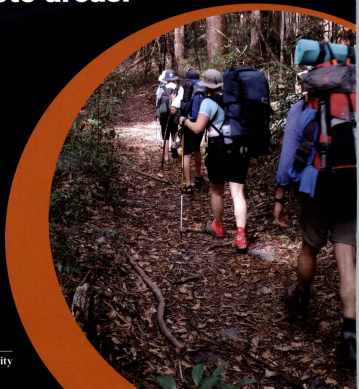
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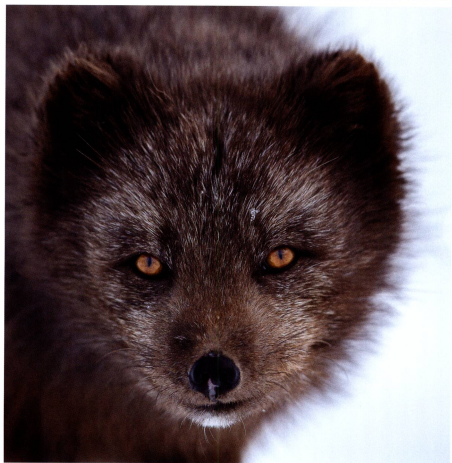




Arctic fox

Award-winning photographer *Joshua Holko* spent weeks in a snow blind in remote Iceland to capture these intimate shots of an Arctic fox





Previous page: The Arctic fox (*Vulpes lagopus*) is endemic to the Arctic regions of the Northern Hemisphere and is therefore well adapted to freezing temperatures.

Clockwise from left: As winter sets in, the Arctic fox sheds its deep brown summer coat, which is quickly replaced by a white one.

The rounded body shape and features of this species is generally believed to help it maintain its temperature by reducing its surface area to volume ratio.

The Arctic fox has been known to stalk prey even though it's moving around underneath the snow pack.

Joshua Holko is a Melbourne-based photographer with international representation at the Wilderness Gallery at Cradle Mountain, Tasmania and the Aspen Gallery in Aspen, USA. He's also had images exhibited at shows and expos the world over, including Photokina in Germany and PhotoPlus in New York.





Sentiment & verse

Dan Slater interviews celebrated bush poet Gregory North in a bid to discover his secret to success

For many of us, *The Man From Snowy River* by Andrew Barton 'Banjo' Patterson represents our earliest bush poetry experience. As evocative and exciting as the poem undoubtedly is, as primary school children we could be forgiven for finding it confusing and, let's not beat about the bush, boring. But then we probably never saw it performed live, in 15 different accents. That's where Greg North comes in.

"It's hard to get people to come along to a poetry show, or anywhere that mentions the p-word," says Greg, "but when they do they usually enjoy it." After all, poems are only words on

Gregory North may be the modern Banjo Patterson.
Photo: David Hill - Blue Mountains Lithgow & Oberon Tourism

paper until they are performed, which Greg does with huge enthusiasm, and he especially relishes school shows because he has the chance to change the lives of his audience. One sweet thank-you letter from Narrandera, New South Wales, read: 'Thank you Greg because before you came to our school, I used to hate poetry but now I think it's pretty good!'

Originally from Wollongong but a Blue Mountains resident since the age of nine, Greg hadn't thought about poetry since school and was happily engaged as a tour guide and driver in Katoomba. In 2003, he saw Peter Berner recite *The Man from Snowy River* on television and was impressed that anyone could remember all the words, so he decided to give it a try himself.

"I went to the local poetry group in the Parakeet Café in Katoomba," Greg remembers, "and there I was inspired by performance poets like Denis Kevans, Milton Taylor and Terry Regan. I was amazed at this fantastic skill that they had, connecting with people through poetry. 'Wow!' I thought, 'I reckon that's something I have to be involved in.'"

So he attended a competition at the café where he forgot his words and didn't do very well, but it was a good learning experience. "I wasn't a wonderful orator at that stage," he admits, although Greg was already involved in his local Toastmasters club, so he had some degree of confidence in public speaking. "Toastmasters whetted my appetite and got me in front of crowds, which I found an enjoyable thing, then poetry came along and I thought that might be an even better way to get in front of crowds. It's performing that makes me come alive, really."

And come alive he did: the very next year Greg was the overall winner at *The Man from Snowy River Bush Festival*, and then began to take out top honours in many other competitions: the Murray Muster, the NSW State Championship, and even the Mustabeenbloodygood Poetry Comp in Gympie. His new vocation obviously agreed with him and the ultimate prize came in 2008 when he was awarded Australian Champion, a title he has now won three times.

At around that time, Greg was introduced to slam poetry – a more modern, knock-out-style format where contestants are limited to original work under two minutes and judged by members of the audience. "It's a great concept which really gets the performer on their toes," he enthuses, "They have to be really entertaining, so for the audience it's terrific." He made it through to the national finals in 2007 and again several times since. Despite the name, bush poetry is not just about the bush – it's any poetry about

Australia that has rhyme & rhythm. One of Greg's favourites is *How McDougal Topped the Score* by Thomas E. Spencer, in which the team from Piper's Flat beat local favourites, Molongo, in a village cricket match thanks to McDougal's sheep dog – old Pincher – who grabbed the ball and led the Molongo men on a merry chase until his master had run fifty to win the match. Another gem is *Wheat* by C.J. Dennis, a touching verse about the satisfaction of growing food to feed the people, which Greg sometimes performs in his shows.

Greg's own poetic subjects include such varied topics as disappearing words, call centre strife and the joys of eating cake. He also delights in sharing yarns: "Yarns are just tall stories that don't have rhyme in them," he explains, "a bit of leg pulling and funny stuff. They're a bit more freeing than a poem as you don't have to get every word exactly right and you can expand or contract it depending on the time available."

A resident of Linden, New South Wales, "The capital of the Blue Mountains," he jokes, Greg makes good use of the surrounding bush. "I do a bit of mountain biking and I walk occasionally," he reveals. "I climbed Mount Bogong when I was in Victoria earlier this week. During my outdoor guiding course at TAFE I did many of the Blue Mountains walks and I got to know a lot about the plants, animals and geology." His local trail knowledge is reflected in an uncannily accurate composition entitled *Blue Mountains Walking (Is All About Stairs)*, written for the 2012 Blue Mountains Festival of Walking. Such a background has naturally given him strong conservationist views that often emerge in his work. "When I tell an environmental story I try to approach it from a humorous angle rather than being preachy," he explains. "I try not to get too political because my main thrust is still entertainment."

**But purity the mountains bring,
does not last very long.**

**For even on the mountainside
some things are going wrong.
With weeds and leral animals,
erosion from the tracks,
The changes Europeans brought
continue their attacks.**

**Impeding and controlling all
that water's nat'l flow,
the wasteful use, pollution and
neglect begin to show.**

**The mighty Murray's gasping,
for its breath is going fast.
It lives in hope this springtime
might improve upon the past.**

Excerpt from *The Murray*, Mate © 2005

Greg's concerns include coal mining and specifically coal seam gas (CSG), an abomination from which was born his latest opus *Frackin' Fricker* – an amusing yet worrying tale about a fictional, unprincipled CSG miner named Philip Fricker. "I just can't understand how anyone can logically think that that's an okay thing to do," he despairs. "They're just trying to extract as much money as possible and to hell with the consequences. I get people coming up to me to say they'd never heard of fracking before but now they understand what's going on."

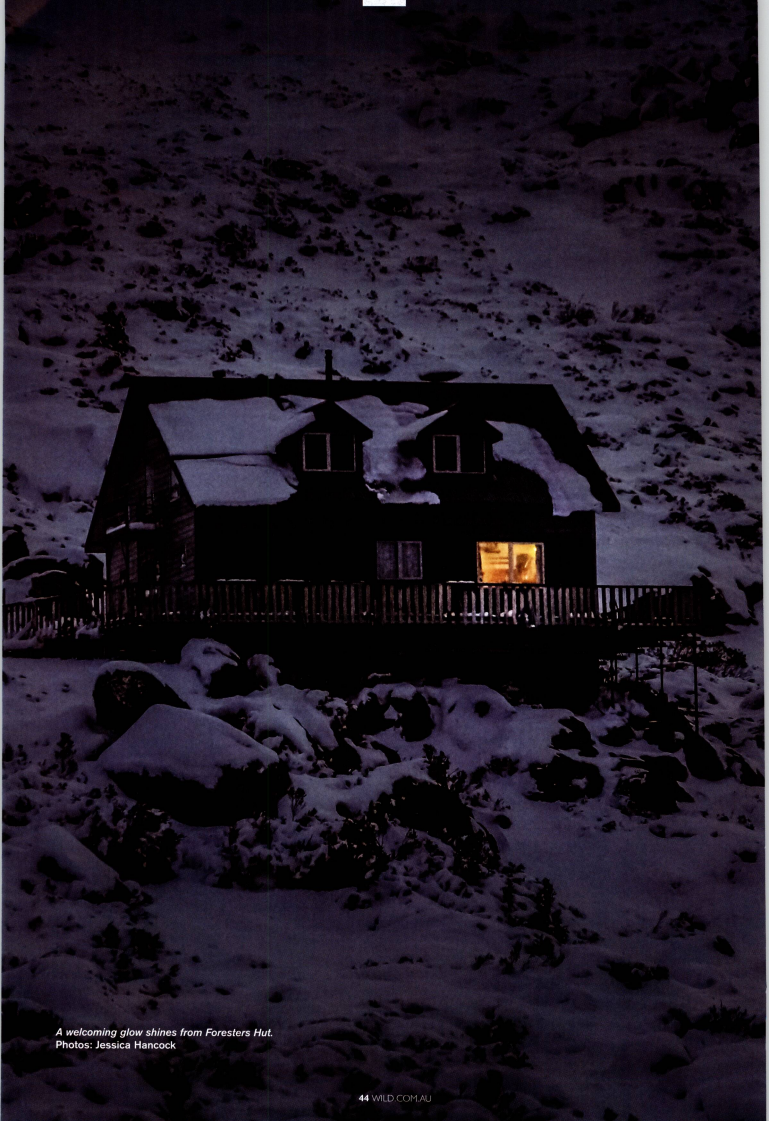
It's pleasing when that happens. I remember doing a show in Winton in Queensland and somebody actually walked out. I found out later he was a coal seam gas miner." That poem is included on Greg's latest CD, *Gregory North goes Frackin' Fricker*, which won Album of the Year and Single of the Year 2014 at the Australian Bush Laureate Awards in Tamworth – an award he is particularly excited to add to his collection. "I've got quite a lot of them now," he admits, modestly, "on shelves and in cupboards here and there." With the competition wins, private performances and CD sales, this one-time hobby has grown to become a full-time occupation and Greg is up on stage as often as possible. "It can be every weekend or it can be once a month, depending on whether I get gigs or not. I still do a bit of driving but mostly poetry is how I earn my crust."

Occasionally his work is written to order: *How Far We've Come* was commissioned by Blue Mountains Lithgow & Oberon Tourism specifically for the Bicentenary of the Blue Mountains Crossings in 2013. Greg currently has about 70 poems on which to draw but is always working on new material. "I went to a book launch the other night where someone was talking about collecting stamps. This piqued my interest so I've been researching that and creating a humorous poem about it. It'll probably get its first outing at the monthly poets meeting (now held in the Blackburn's Family Hotel in Katoomba) so I'll see how it goes there, maybe tweak it a bit and if it's good enough it'll become part of my repertoire."

When asked about his own favourite poem, Greg names *Gundungarra Man*, a serious and beautiful verse pondering what aboriginal life would have been like in the mountains before Europeans came. "There are quite a few areas around Linden that have aboriginal axe-grinding grooves and I happened to cross one of those spots while I was walking one day. I got me thinking about what life would have been like for the people who made those marks." **W**



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A welcoming glow shines from Foresters Hut.
Photos: Jessica Hancock

By the end of the century, skiing and winter as we know them will have altered irrevocably.

Internationally, climate concerned ski resorts are investing heavily in snow-making technology and renewable energy. Educational campaigns emphasising the impact climate change will have on alpine areas and snowfall are also becoming a standard part of ski resorts, because the impact will be severe. Already in the last 50 years, the northern hemisphere has lost more than 2.5 million square kilometres of spring snow cover, the snowfall most affected by rising temperatures. Climatologists examining the future of the Winter Olympics in light of cancellations at Sochi estimated that of the 19 cities that have previously hosted the winter games, only 10 might be able to do so again by mid-century, and by 2100 only six will still be reliably cold enough.

Here in Australia, *The Impact of Climate Change on Snow Conditions in Mainland Australia*, a 2003 report by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), found that the Snowy Mountains had lost a third of its snowpack since the 1950s. It also reported that the mountains could lose more than half their snow again by mid-century. The 2013 update to the Victorian-specific aspects of the report, with a decade of further climate science behind it, noted that the emissions scenario over those years had been following the medium to high emissions projections. The updated report continued to estimate decreases in snow cover, snow depth and snow-season length. Since 2007, Perisher alone has invested more than \$22 million in snowmaking infrastructure. Of course, investment in snowmaking technology only limits the effects of early climate change symptoms; for the dramatic changes to emissions necessary, energy production and consumption need to be radically rethought, and Australia's commitment to cut emissions is minimal. Undoubtedly aware of this, United States ski giant Vail Resorts bought Perisher for A\$178 million in March this year. While the resort itself shudders under the weight of a warming climate, the hope for Vail is that Australian skiers will continue investing in season passes with the guarantee of at least being able to ski in North America if the Australian season is negligible. Ironically, in order to escape the effects of climate change, people are being encouraged to seasonally fly half-way

around the world and back. Even more recently, in May, Thredbo joined the Mountain Collective as the first fully international partner of an otherwise North American focused collective of independent ski resorts.

Yet, as bad as the situation looks for the mainland Australian resorts, perhaps these businesses can take some inspiration from the most unlikely of sources: Ben Lomond, Tasmania. Not because climate change will be kind to this ski slope (quite the reverse), but because this surprisingly popular resort with its loyal following has always struggled with difficult conditions.

This is not to say that conditions were poor when I visited Ben Lomond for the first time. I had booked flights to Tasmania months earlier for an early July trip with my partner Nick, and we had entirely resigned

expecting snow, were established as a norm early in the history of northern Tasmanian skiing. In fact, northern Tasmanian skiing was first inspired by an enormous dump in 1929, which generated so much enthusiasm and so many home-made skis (early ones modelled on those left behind by Amundsen on his return from the South Pole) that the Northern Tasmanian Alpine Club (NTAC) was formed by the end of the year. Frederick Smithies, a driving force and founder of this club, was also the one to look to Ben Lomond when the bitter disappointment of the very next season proved that Pine Lake on the Western Tiers, at around 1200 metres above sea level, was not going to get reliably skiable snow.

Of course, back in those days there was no road up Ben Lomond to speak of. The keen skiers, with their heavy wooden skis in tow,

used old tracks up the mountain formed by fur trappers and landowners for years on end. Marking a route with old number plates nailed onto trees, skiers from NTAC chose a site on the edge of the tree line at around 1200 metres elevation for what became the Carr Villa Chalet, built in 1932. This was built in time for the exceptionally poor snow season of that year, resulting in the skiers taking their horses as far as Carr Villa, climbing for an hour to the plateau and to the sections of snow that had lasted beyond the June snowstorms. In spite of this arduous task, the hut at Carr Villa was occupied nearly every weekend. The winter of 1933 was described as having the lightest snow cover in living memory, yet the chalet continued to be occupied every weekend. When the snow of 1934 was somehow even worse, the Ski Club maintained enthusiasm,

ready to appreciate the long-awaited winter of 1935 when the snow cover was decent enough to hold the first Tasmanian Ski Championships. Competitors from across the state and a referee from Victoria managed to hike and climb their way up the mountain to the ski slopes for the action. Even the road to the farmstead, beyond which there was a walk of more than three kilometres to Carr Villa alone, was a challenge. David Harvey's book on the history of Ben Lomond records this scene from Heini von See's memory: 'On another trip... we had so many punctures the inner tube disintegrated, so we filled the tyre up with grass. This went all right for a while until the grass turned to chaff and fell out the hole in the tyre. By this time a split had developed in the tyre about two feet long. We

SKI

Ben Lomond!

Jessica Hancock contemplates how climate change will continue to impact Australia's snowfields from the vantage point of a small Tasmanian resort steeped in ski history

ourselves to the likelihood of a snowless visit. On my part, I was happy enough to be visiting Ben Lomond at all, and particularly keen on the prospect of staying with Nick's family at one of the ski lodges. With the ski village sitting at a mere 1470 metres above sea level, and the highest peak of the mountain, Legges Tor, at 1572 metres, luck and short-term weather conditions play almost as much a part as the season, with snow falling in summer some years and barely falling in winter in others. In our case, an early dump of snow meant a magical week on the plateau, almost entirely missed by the ski tow operators who opened the lifts a week after the fall. These surprising dumps of snow, contrasted against inevitable disappointment when



Perfect conditions on the plateau



Dawn on Ossians Throne

had some old bags in the car so we stuffed these in the tyre. We realised however that the hole in the tyre was so big, even these would fall out, so I stood on someone's shoulder and with a tomahawk hacked a wire stay on a telephone post. This didn't improve the tomahawk but it did the job. With the wire acquired we then wired the tyre on the wheel. This worked into a lump, but we limped home.'

80 years later, I drive casually along the road to Carr Villa: a road that took until 1953 to complete. In a moment I pass the turn-off to the chalet and continue up to Jacob's Ladder, the road that finally brought car access to the summit in the 1960s. These days, this narrow and steep zig-zagging stretch of road is largely famous for its dramatic appearance as it snakes up the mountain, but Nick assures me that the hair-pin bends over precipitous falls are nothing compared with how the road looked when he was younger. Crash barriers and a widened road apparently make it a casual drive for Tasmanians, so I let Nick take the car as I try to resist cringing at oncoming traffic on the snowy road.

The view from the top of the ladder is glorious, and we pause to appreciate it under the morning's fresh snow before driving across the plateau to the Ski Village. We are to spend the week at Foresters Lodge, which in 1968 was the first lodge under construction in what was to become the Village. In 1990, unoccupied and hidden in thick fog, it was also the first to catch fire. It was lost, the cause of the fire never determined. Thankfully, the Foresters Ski Club and their enthusiastic friends commenced work before the end of the year, and they were able to occupy the new lodge by the next winter season.

Not a lot has changed since then, with

Foresters' maintenance of a ban on all electronic equipment also preserving a pre-electronic feel. Foresters has also continued the Austrian tradition, embraced by the Ben Lomond skiing community, of "Krambampuli." Croatian plum brandy called šljivovica, or other Schnapps, is placed in shot glasses (or preferably a more durable vessel), and set alight. Sugar cubes are then tentatively balanced on forks over the flame while the Krambampuli song is sung. In the case of Foresters, dirty Limerick poems (preferably about those also burning sugar into alcohol around the table) are exchanged between bouts of the song, until the sugar is melted and the shot is shot.

To burn off this concoction in the morning, and to appreciate the apparently special phenomenon of good snow and weather, we cross-country skied across the plateau. Ben Lomond is renowned for producing excellent skiers, for the rock-strewn terrain and difficult conditions force them to improve. Over the course of the week, between breaks at the hut eating scones and drinking tea, I tried my hand skiing with my mother's ancient skis. It was certainly in the Ben Lomond tradition, including having to repair both boots with screws over the course of the week to keep them from falling apart. Most of the other people cross-country skiing in the area were also on old gear, with modern telemark skis few and far between. As such, most of the skiing is down across the flats of the plateau, with only a few rising to the hills. Even on the flat, the edges of the plateau offer spectacular views down from the mountain, north to Flinders Island, east to the coast, and west to the Great Western Tiers. The quality of Ben Lomond cross-country skiing

depends in a large part on the snow levels, but rocks and shrubs are almost certain in any part of the season.

The gear may be old, the huts may be without mains electricity (or no electricity at all in the case of Foresters), and the seven tows may be old and unreliable pomas and t-bars, but that is part of the appeal. The mountain is seen as very family friendly, with cheap hire and lift passes, and snow play (tobogganing, snow fights and other non-technical engagement with the snow) as much enjoyed and highly considered as skiing and boarding. This traditional feel of the mountain is intentionally cultivated and consciously appreciated as something unique from the mainland Australian resorts. This feel has in turn appealed to mainland Australia as well, with a crowd-sourced film about modern Australian skiers and snowboarders recreating 1930s snow adventures released in May this year. *The Roof of Oz* draws inspiration from Geoffrey Colling's 1957 film *The Roof of Australia*, and the goal of the trip is to "equal the heroic feats of early alpine explorers," in this case in Kosciuszko National Park. Certainly, Kosciuszko plays the most obvious role in the Australian snow imaginary, with the old mining town of Kiandra able to claim the title of the world's first recreational ski club from their start in 1861. This was solidified as part of our cultural understanding of the Australian landscape, which is otherwise largely focused on beaches and deserts, through the work of the poet Banjo Patterson, who had close associations with the town and was on the executive of the Kiandra Snow Shoe Club from 1896. While a largely white and masculine understanding of the snow emerged from this tradition, the

significance of the high country cattlemen and their legacy continues to have a broad hold of the Australian understanding of the alpine region. Andrew Gorman-Murray, in his essay 'Before and After Climate Change: The Snow Country in Australian Imaginaries,' explains that changes wrought by climate change to the alpine region will affect not only the physical landscape, but also our national cultural heritage.

On a more local scale, Gorman-Murray has also examined the response of Tasmanians (specifically Hobartians) to the threat that climate change poses to Tasmanian snow.

Although the lower elevations of Tasmania's highlands than the mainland's high country result in less consistent snow, the more southerly latitude of the island means that Tasmanians experience snow more regularly and closer to home than their mainland counterparts, who associate snow with rural or wilderness areas. The Tasmanians interviewed in the study felt a connection with snow as much tangible as imaginary, and wanted their children and grandchildren to experience this. To them, their experience of local snow was culturally and emotionally important, a part of their unique Tasmanian identity. While the 2003 CSIRO study (mentioned earlier in this article) was specifically not concerned with Tasmania and called for more research of the island, Tasmanian snow conditions will most certainly be affected by climate change.

This sense of both the precariousness and the preciousness of Tasmanian snow are evident in the Ski Ben Lomond song, sung many times in my week on the mountain. Composed by Peter Lawrence and Paddy Burges Watson in the mid-80s, and representative of the mountain at that time (the famously friendly manager of Alpine Enterprises, Eryl, had since passed away), the song nevertheless expresses some of the core constants of the skiing community at Ben Lomond: appreciation of good conditions, expectation of poor ones, and the ability to enjoy the area no matter the weather.

Although climate change is certain to affect this area, the popularity of Ben Lomond remains impressive, and potential for further enjoyment of the mountain continues to be explored. A tender was advertised in May this year for a \$20,000 feasibility study funded by various levels of government and groups, and instigated by the Ben Lomond Committee. Part of the study will focus on the winter sports of Ben Lomond, especially in maintaining the existing snowfall, some of which otherwise gets swept off by the wind. The study will also explore expanding the appeal of the mountain in its summer and shoulder seasons. Mountain biking and hiking, the staples of summer recreation for other ski resorts, have great potential for a mountain as spectacular and as close to an airport as Ben Lomond.

My own time at Ben Lomond included a day of downhill skiing when the tows opened, although I was far less adept at dodging rocks than the Tasmanians. By the end of my time, there the rains had finally come in, as they are wont to do in Tasmania, but even flurries of wet sleet couldn't take away from the joy of sliding down a slope on a car inner tube. I was truly inspired by Ben Lomond and the traditions of skiing there: not because the conditions have been good, or because their struggle has been easy, but because their attitude has allowed them to enjoy everything their mountain has to offer. If skiing and the alpine regions are part of our cultural heritage, then even though climate change will alter the physical landscape, it is within the power of our actions and words to maintain the importance of this cultural heritage. And, perhaps even to fight for it.

For the full tale of this rich history, see David Harvey's masterful book, *The Story of Ben Lomond*. [W](#)

SKI BEN LOMOND

Chorus: Ski Ben Lomond - never had a better time
Skiing all together
Ski Ben Lomond - never mind the ladder climb
Ski in any kind of weather

Skiing on the mountain where the cold winds blow
Singing till we're dreaming - soon we'll know, know, know
What's that on the window - is it snow, snow, snow
That's the way we like it!

Chorus

Everyone is skiing with such style and grace
Langlaufers are happy going every place
Everyone's a winner in the junior race
That's the way we like it!

Chorus

Edelweiss is covered with a heap of snow
Roger in his snowplough's keeping on the go
Could it ever happen? Well you never know
That's the way we like it!

Chorus

On the 30 second, snow's a metre deep
Tried to ride the summit, but it's much too steep
Eryl thinks his ski-tow charges far too cheap
That's the way we like it!

Chorus

NTAC's running in the bright moon light
Not a rock is showing - what a perfect sight!
Sunny in the daytime - snowing every night
That's the way we like it!

Chorus

Everybody's happy while the world is white
A party in the tavern almost every night,
Everybody's stuck here - what a dreadful plight!
That's the way we like it!

Chorus

No-one's in ski rentals, 'cos they're out of skis
Brian's on the mountain, teaching he's and she's
How to tackle moguls on their bended knees
That's the way we like it!

Chorus

Have we all been dreaming, will we ever know
Such a wonderland of white with all that snow?
Does it really matter when it's go, go, go?
That's the way we like it!

Peak of Adventure

Filmmaker *Michael Dillon* recalls Tim Macartney-Snape's historic sea-to-summit expedition to commemorate the event's 25th anniversary

We leave Everest Base Camp before dawn, stumbling downwards, head torches lighting the way. You can't see Everest's summit from its Base Camp, but an hour's walk down-valley you can. On this, the morning of the 11th of May, 1990, we desperately want to see its summit and long to see our companion standing there triumphant. He will be the first person ever to have climbed the entire height of Everest, from sea to summit. But would we see him? Would he succeed?

The first rays of dawn lighten the sky but nothing can lighten our spirits. We are afraid. We've had no radio contact with our companion, Tim Macartney-Snape, since he left for the summit last night. It could be flat batteries, or something far, far worse. Our friend is alone, high in the death zone, climbing without bottled oxygen on the last long night of his four-month, 8848-metre climb. Ann, Tim's wife of one year, grips the walkie-talkie tightly and calls into the silent night. There is no reply. Six years earlier, in 1984, I had filmed on Everest for the first time. It was the Australian Expedition, the first ever attempt by a group of climbers from Earth's flattest continent. You'd think they'd choose the easiest route, but instead they took on the hardest challenge ever attempted on Everest: a climb without bottled oxygen, by a new and very steep route. Two of them made the summit, Greg Mortimer and Tim Macartney-Snape.

I'll never forget that summit day, my telephoto lens trained on two red dots, each glowing in the last rays of sunshine, and those two red dots coming together as one on the summit. Now I'm back on Everest, training that same lens on the summit ridge. Again I see nobody. Ann, her voice fraught with worry, calls again into the lonely night: "Tim, can you hear me?" But there is still no reply.

My mind wanders back to Tim's first Everest climb. At the summit he'd had energy to spare. He'd filmed, he'd photographed, he'd made a long, eloquent speech into a tape recorder. When he came down I asked him if Everest had been a little higher, did he still think he could have climbed it? Tim's response was an unreserved "yes". Months later, we were trekking together in the Himalayas in the company of Dick Smith, when I put it to Tim that he hadn't really climbed Everest. In fact, no one had. It's a mountain 8848 metres high and it's measured from sea level. In 1984, we had started our physical climb of the mountain at over 5000 metres, having reached that altitude by plane and truck. To truly climb Everest, Tim would have to climb the bottom half as well as the top half, every single 8848 meters of its height. He would have to start at sea level. Some days later it was Christmas and Dick gave us the biggest Christmas present ever. He told Tim that if he were crazy enough to try climbing Everest from sea level then he, Dick Smith, would be crazy enough to fund the

whole venture, both the expedition and the film.

Before 1953 some thought Everest's summit was just out of reach, but Hillary and Tenzing proved otherwise. Some thought it too high for man to climb without supplementary oxygen, but in 1978 Messner and Habler proved otherwise.

What of the ultimate challenge? Was it possible to climb its entire height? Was it possible to start from sea level, 8848 metres below its summit and a thousand kilometres distance from it, to climb the whole distance, at no stage using bottled oxygen and still have enough stamina to place that final footstep on its summit snow?

We sat there, almost frantic now, gazing up into the death zone, desperate for some clue that Tim was still alive. "Tim, Tim." Ann was almost crying now. She gripped the walkie-talkie tightly. "Tim, Tim, can you hear me? Where are you, Tim?"

It was light enough now to clearly see Everest's summit ridge. The summit on the left and the ridge sloping downwards to a shark's fin-like protrusion on the right: Everest's south summit. Here, if he appeared at all, Tim would emerge onto earth's highest, most dangerous stage, for the final act of our four-month drama. Yet the stage remained empty.

Had he failed in his quest, yet there was still so much to look back on. Our five weeks of walking through India, camping most nights near villages, constantly engaging with its people; the



joy, colour and chaos of the Indian roads. Then Nepal: on trails through emerald terraced fields and flower filled forests, the songs of our porters, the friendship of the hill folk before reaching Base Camp, and then six weeks later, this day of days. For four months we'd truly lived, our lives energised by a goal. Succeed or fail, the effort and the journey had been worth it. I recalled the proverb, "The road is better than the inn" and wondered whether anyone before us had walked such an interesting road.

For four months we'd lived at a proper pace, indulging in Everest climbing: the world's slowest sport. And living, more often than not, in what's left of our natural world, the ancient world of forests and mountains. I recalled Tim's words as we walked through glorious rhododendron forests with majestic snow peaks shining brightly: "You know, it's funny how we pity animals caged in zoos, but forget we're animals too, forget we need to run wild and free".

"The human race was born in the wild, grew up in it," he'd said. "Away from it we become exhausted, run down. We need the natural world. It's crucial to our wellbeing."

Rearing above us, this May morning, that greatest of alters to the natural world: Everest. The sun had risen now and our lonely group gazed skywards, hungry for a sight of Tim and cursing the clouds that had begun to descend like curtains on a stage.

"Tim! Tim!" cried Ann. "I can see him!" There he was, a tiny dot on the summit ridge. We rushed our eyes to our telephoto lenses. It was him. Blue down suit, no oxygen cylinder, no rucksack. A pedestrian way out of bounds. The tiny figure stood still, advanced ten paces, then stopped for several minutes, just to recover from the effort of those ten steps. I filmed him with my telephoto lens, but knew the real drama was happening up there, and knew Tim would be filming it, holding his camera out at the end of his long arm, pointing it back at himself and talking into it.

We watched his tiny figure move slowly onwards. Five paces. Two minutes crouching, panting for breath. Five more paces.

Now two other figures had appeared on the skyline, both

with the telltale hump of oxygen cylinders on their backs. Tim hadn't contemplated using bottled oxygen. His aim, after all, was to climb the whole 8848 metres of Everest, and using bottled oxygen brings the altitude down to about 5000 meters, Base Camp-level. If Tim was to climb the whole mountain, his lungs had to physically climb it as well, somehow cope at the outer limit of our atmosphere. He must know we are watching him now. But still he makes no gesture, no contact on his walkie-talkie. And so we worry. We know the little oxygen there is up there is being used to keep Tim's body core working. Little is left to go to his

extremities, making frostbite more likely. Little is left to go to the brain, a demanding organ that requires twenty per cent of our oxygen intake to function properly. It's not for nothing they call this the death zone.

Staring upwards, we urge the tiny blue figure on. We think of the hardships he's suffering, and the hardships along the 1000-kilometre road to where he is now: 500 kilometres of dodging trucks on narrow diesel fume-filled roads, days immobilised by a chest infection in an Indian village, his three kilometre swim across the Ganges, the 280 kilometre detour he had to run – two marathons a day – to get from a closed border crossing to an open one. All of this prior to the effort of his reconnaissance climb on Everest's west ridge.

Yet here he is now, just five minutes from the end of his road. Just five minutes of superhuman effort to go. Another five steps. Another two minutes crouched breathless.

"Tim, you're so close... just keep going. Tim. Not far now." Ann is crying now. We all are.

And then, finally, a voice. At last Tim's voice rings out from the walkie-talkie.

"Hello Ann, do you read me? Over."

"I'm listening"

"I'm on top. I made it."

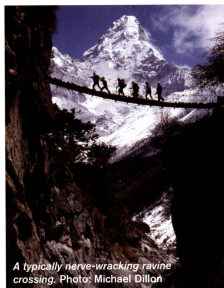
As we shed tears of joy and relief, Tim places in the summit snow a shell from the beach where our journey began and screws his camera to the head of his ice axe to film his summit speech.

It is 1990 on a beautiful summit morning and Tim stresses the need for every one of us to climb the mountains in our minds; to find within the wisdom to end the suffering that we impose on each other and this beautiful planet.

He packs away his camera and gazes to the south, beyond the rows and rows of mountains, beyond the distant clouds, towards the sea. How satisfying it is to have come all that way.

Postscript

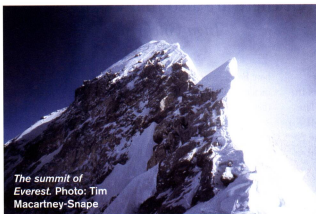
25 years since Tim Macartney-Snape completed his historic climb of Everest from sea to summit, the feat remains unrepeatable. Michael Dillon's resulting film, *Everest – Sea to Summit*, went on to win many awards and he continues to make adventure films today. [W](#)



A typically nerve-wracking ravine crossing. Photo: Michael Dillon



Tim films himself on the approach to the summit. Photo: Tim Macartney-Snape



The summit of Everest. Photo: Tim Macartney-Snape

Mountain and ski guide Mal Haskins uses a saw to demonstrate how to cut a pit.
Photos: Inga Gilchrist



Backcountry SAFETY

Beyond the ski resort boundaries the adventurous may find ungroomed, uncrowded thrills, but there are also many dangers to be aware of writes
Inga Gilchrist

Open slopes. Virgin snow. Your small group the only humans in sight. Time holds its breath. The backcountry beckons, and you kick off into the fall line. But that's not just the earth moving for you, that's the whole gully fracturing into an avalanche.

"We get people who've been playing in the backcountry already quite a bit and they might

have had a scare, or their mate has had an incident, and apart from getting climbing skills, they want to get hazard management skills."

- New Zealand Mountain Safety Council assistant program manager avalanche Gordon Smith

Close shaves, misadventure, the euphemistic "epic". Sound familiar? If it does, you're far from alone. As the trickle of Australians venturing beyond

resort boundaries becomes a torrent, demand for backcountry courses is climbing. Near misses as well as tragedies are driving an appetite for learning, say Australasian avalanche experts and ski guides. In ever-greater numbers, skiers and riders want the skills to take the big lines out the back and live to do it again. The factors driving the stampede out the back are twofold: eye-candy footage, and

advances in gear that make freeriding safer by the year. In less than a decade, heavy bindings with discouraging levels of play have given way to precise, light set-ups. Gone, too, is the assumption that skinning up meant riding down on a pair of dogs. The qualities of camber and cut aimed at (cover your ears) enjoying the descent have leeches from big mountain skis to their lightweight cousins.

Amid the backcountry fever, Australian School of Mountaineering operations director Glen Nash has witnessed an epidemic of ignorance: "Over the last few years, more and more resort-based skiers and snowboarders like to go outside the boundaries," he says, "(about 90 per cent) go out there totally unaware".

"They like the idea of wild skiing, backcountry skiing, extreme skiing and pushing it a bit and a lot of the time it's sheer luck that they get away with it." Or as ski guide and former Olympian Steve Lee puts it, "There's so much in the ski movies about the backcountry now that every man and his dog wants to disappear in to the backcountry - and they've got no idea".

Australian riders pack this approach along with their passport. Hakuba-based avalanche instructor Damian Banwell has seen plenty of willing blindness among Australian powerhounds in Japan, which he partly blames on our "she'll be right" culture.

"Human beings make decisions driven by emotion and this does apply particularly to Australians. They've flown all the way to Japan, they'll tend to ignore any training or awareness they have in order to maximise their time in the backcountry."

Smith agrees. "Many people just casually go into the backcountry like it's another ski run: they don't leave intentions, there's no thinking going into trip planning. Like, 'If my mate takes a tumble and takes a while to get out, he's going to be a popsicle by the time someone comes to get him out.'"

For skiers who hear the siren song of beyond-resort lines but want to avoid going for a ride in the big white cement mixer, help is at hand. More than a dozen Australasian providers run avalanche courses ranging from a few hours to a few days, which aim to give you the skills to pick a good risk from the bad and the ugly.

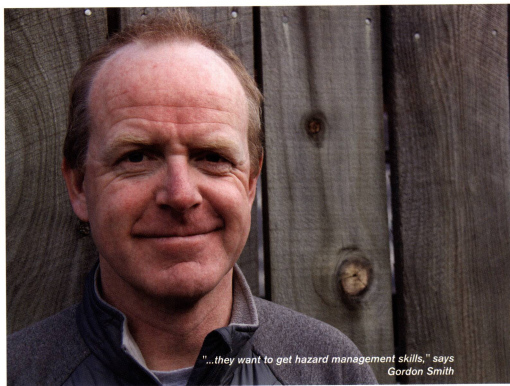
SCHOOL'S IN

Shooting down the culvert in a racing snowplough, the number on my

tranceiver's screen was plunging:

73-metres, 50-something, 30-odd - this felt good. Then the arrow starting flipping around like light off a disco ball. "Must be on one of the signal lines" - the thought flashed - but the number was still dropping, and I surged on, legs bumping around like outriggers. Suddenly the number shot back up, and as I jerked to a stop, confused, my search buddy shouted from above that he was on to something. *Shit. I'd skied straight past it.*

Alpine Guides runs a four-day program endorsed by the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council. The council ratifies two backcountry courses for non-professionals:



"...they want to get hazard management skills," says Gordon Smith

Avalanche Awareness and Backcountry Avalanche. The awareness course is basic and runs for a night and a day. It's a prerequisite for doing the intermediate level backcountry program.

Up to 40 per cent of the students on a typical course are Australian, about a third of them women. The course content echoes recent trends away from emphasis on pits, shear tests and snow crystal transformation in favour of reading the terrain and becoming alert to human frailties that can undo the best-learned lessons.

You might not learn fancy phrases to toss around in the bar, but you'll come away with things that resonate, like your most important source of weather information: look-out-the-window-dot-com.

Our group included NZ freerider Briar Peters, two local school-leavers-cum-aspiring ski patrollers and a pair of Perth mountaineers with 8000-metre peaks in their sights.

Our instructor was Australian IFMGA mountain and ski guide Mal Haskins, fired up about mountaineering and determined to get us thinking. He wanted us to learn how to pick avalanche terrain and move through it.

Haskins rates the general skiing community's level of avalanche awareness as low and says the need for avalanche education is urgent. "Everybody is frothing to go out the back."

BEFORE YOU DUCK THE ROPE

Preparation for that dream descent starts before breakfast, when you check the online avalanche bulletin (in NZ) or call the nearest ski patrol, hut keeper or heliski operator for information about the avalanche risk on your proposed route. Apply that information to your route. Consider which direction the slopes face, their altitude and steepness. Recent avalanches on similar slopes are a reliable sign that your route could be set to release.

Next, check several weather sites and web cams, look out at the sky, and note the key points in your trip planning book. Heavy snowfall or rain in the last 24 hours, strong wind and fast temperature rises will all increase the avalanche risk.

Tell someone reliable your proposed route, and when they should trigger a search if you're not back.

GEARING UP

Carry a transceiver, shovel and probe, and practice using them often. Replace your batteries when they reach 60 per cent. Guides and avalanche instructors contacted by Wild were unanimous that air bags, Avalungs, three-antennae transceivers and this year, a digital snowpack probe, have been important advances at the planning and rescue ends of the equation.

But in practice, Haskins says, skiers' exposure to danger remains steady because they tend to take greater risks when they're wearing all the safety gear. "People go (on to the slope) because they've got their rescue equipment and it makes them safer.

"But what makes you safe is better decision-making and terrain choice."

TERRAIN, TERRAIN, TERRAIN

Terrain is to an avalanche instructor what location is to a real estate agent. On rolling runs fringing Cardrona, Haskins had us wrestling with slope angles and run-out zones. It was a shock. Avalanches roll about twice as far as my naive imaginings. In many more places than you'd guess, the nearest safe spot is on the other side of the valley.

Haskins taught us to look at the snowscape through a different lens, where terrain features litter a slope with clues to its hazards. Time and again, he reminded us to observe, to burn those clues into our memories during sunny breaks when the visibility was good. He pushed us to, instead of skinning in a robotic daze, categorise our observations.

Most slab avalanches (the type that stars on YouTube) are triggered on slopes between 30 and 45 degrees - in other words, anything that looks fun to ski. Carrying and using a plastic avalanche assessor card will soon sharpen your slope-measuring skills.

Leeward slopes are likely to have deeper snow poised on any weak layer, and be less stable. Shady slopes will take longer to stabilise during the season, and sunny slopes are more prone to wet slides when they heat quickly.

Trigger points might be something your shiatsu masseuse includes in your après-ski regime but you want to avoid them during business hours. Steer clear of rollovers, wide treeless slopes, shallow snow and cornices.

The good news is that spacing out group members, and following ridges and low-angle slopes will cut your avalanche risk. But venturing beyond resorts means that the risk will never be zero.

Haskins, asked if the backcountry is no place for a skier who needs certainty, pauses.

"That's a really difficult question. If somebody is expecting to go out into the field and say, 'This slope is 100 per cent safe,' then that person has not fully grasped avalanche mechanics.

"You can never be 100 per cent sure an avalanche will not happen on a slope.

"A ski field is Disneyland, where the hazard has been eliminated, so (when a skier ducks the boundary rope) they have no idea they're skiing in avalanche terrain. "Even when people have done courses they sometimes have this perception that digging a snow pit will give them a yes/no answer."

PIT STOP

Just below a ridge, Haskins pulled out his saw to cut a snow pit. We learnt about rough and smooth sliding surfaces, checked out the temperature gradient in the snowpack and boggled at the hieroglyphics Haskins logged in his trip notebook.

Skinning and skiing was the least demanding part of the course. We had fresh legs and bulging brains. We turned for the resort and demonstrated one of the classic mistakes he'd been teaching us about: get-home-itis.

Human factors are behavioural tics that undermine our better judgement.

Research shows that avalanche victims often had the skills to recognise unstable conditions but chose to go anyway. To ensure you don't undo all your great route-finding with a dumb decision, run through this checklist:

- **Familiarity.** Are you over-confident because you've skied it before? Approach it with fresh eyes.
- **Seeking acceptance.** Are you silencing a doubt because you fear rejection by the group? Your input may be the factor that keeps everyone alive to ski again.
- **Commitment.** Are you sticking to your original plan at any cost? Make it your goal to return safely.
- **Expertise.** Are you following a perceived expert? Question authority.
- **Scarcity.** Are you racing to get first tracks? If the slope goes, you'll only get a few turns in anyway.
- **Social proof.** Have you assumed that

others doing it makes it okay? Would you do it alone, without a transceiver?

THE SIMPLE (HELI) LIFE

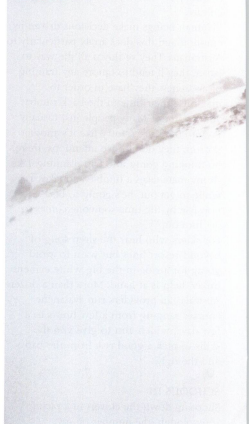
Jubilant that we hadn't lost or maimed anyone on day three, day four's plan came together more quickly: a low bowl at Treble Cone called Poor Man's Heli. Haskins kept pushing us to observe the terrain and snow through our new lens of hazard awareness.

We'd crammed in the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (simple/challenging/complex), the avi bulletin risk rating (one to five), primary and secondary avalanche risk, avalanche assessment factors (terrain/conditions/human), three classes of observations (first/second/third) ... we had more scales going than the von Trapp Family Singers.

Haskins didn't give up. He fired questions at us during each layer of our decision-making and we returned serve with hundreds of unforced errors, and the odd winner.

Our decisions were by consensus, that is, we'd only do something if everybody was on board. This method helped lower our risk-taking, Haskins said, because groups usually make more conservative decisions

Skinning and skiing was the least demanding part of the backcountry safety course



than an autocratic leader.

Haskins' prediction was borne out in our pre-trip planning, during our skinning and as we faced our ski descents: we whittled down our options until the person who was feeling most cautious was happy with the plan. The flip side was that marshalling the thoughts of six beginner route-finders was like herding cats.

My transceiver grazed the snow and the display flickered at 1.7, 1.8 metres and dropping. I liked the numbers I was seeing. This time I'd slowed my gallop. When the figure bottomed out at 1.1 metres I dumped a glove as a target and stabbed with the probe like St George spearing the dragon. Bullseye. "Strike!" I yelled to Haskins, who stopped the clock at 1:42, 40 seconds faster than my first go. Not enough for a podium finish, but on the right track. It felt great.

Smith says than in 20 years of avalanche control work he's had plenty of chances to see the "avalanche beast" in all its forms.

"You get to see how powerful and how big and how destructive they can be, and it's awe-inspiring - I get it.

"But at the same time, it puts it in

perspective, it increases your respect for the natural phenomenon."

Smith says a skier's need for avalanche education is part of a simple equation:

"They're essential skills if they want to keep doing that and not widow a wife or orphan a child.

"I've been involved in extracting two people in that exact scenario and met their parents, and the aftermath of it. It's not a small factor in why I do what I do."

Spurred by his involvement in the search for Martie Buckland and Daniel Kerr in last winter's fatal avalanche at Mount Bogong, Falls Creek ski patrol manager Matt O'Keefe started backcountry awareness education.

Overwhelmed by demand, O'Keefe and the Falls Creek patrol will this year run more backcountry awareness sessions.

It can't come soon enough for Nash. The backcountry death toll is likely to rise, he says, if the skiing community doesn't educate itself, fast.

For Briar Peters, completing a four-day avalanche course has given her pause.

"In terms of the ski line choice ... I don't think it'll change my line a lot.

"For skinning, it'll make me think a lot more about the line I pick." *W*



AVALANCHE COURSES THIS WINTER

K7 Adventures

Jindabyne

AST 1 (two days)

August 15-23

\$300

www.facebook.com/mountainlifejp/
notes

Australian School of Mountaineering

Jindabyne

Avalanche Awareness (three days)

August

\$795 (795)

climbingadventures.com.au/

Bill Barker

Mount Hotham

Avalanche Awareness (1.5 days)

July-Aug

\$TBA

www.billstrips.com/

Falls Creek Ski Patrol

Mount McKay

Backcountry Awareness (half-day)

Weekends until mid-August

\$120

www.fallscreek.com.au

Mount Hotham Ski Patrol

Mount Hotham

Snow Safety Skills (three days)

September 4-6

\$300

davidjwilson921@hotmail.com

Alpine Guides

Mount Cook/Mackenzie

Backcountry Avalanche (four days)

July to September

\$1900

<http://www.alpineguides.co.nz/programs/backcountry.htm>

Chill Adventures (Anna Keeling)

Craigieburn

Avalanche Awareness (two days)

August 7-8, 14-15

\$304

www.chillout.co.nz/courses/

New Zealand Snow Safety Institute

Temple Basin

Avalanche Awareness (weekend),

Backcountry Skills for Skiers and

Snowboarders (five days)

July 13-17, 27-31, August 1-2

\$515, \$1170

www.nzssi.com/schedule.htm



Beginner's guide to *splitboarding*

A cross-country snowboarder.
Photo courtesy of Jones Snowboards

Skiers have traditionally dominated the field of backcountry snowsports, but recently they've given some ground thanks to an innovation in snowboarding, writes *Jennifer Ennion*

More Australians are venturing into backcountry alpine areas, boosting not only off-piste ski and snowboard tours, but also leading to growth in the splitboarding industry. Never heard of splitboarding? Don't worry, many Australian snow lovers haven't. But that's starting to change as more retail stores embrace the products and more snowboarders look for their next challenge. So what is splitboarding and, more importantly, how do you get in on the action?

THE BASICS

Splitboarding has been around since the

early 1990s, but because of the adventurous nature of the winter sport, it's largely remained off the radar for Aussie snow lovers. At its most simple level, splitboarding is to snowboarders what cross-country skiing is to downhill skiers: it opens up the back country for snowboarders who would otherwise have to strap into snow shoes and carry their regular boards out of resort boundaries, or simply stick to resort runs. Basically, the splitboard looks similar to a regular snowboard but separates into two planks, not dissimilar to skis, which are then used with climbing skins. This separation allows

JOHN BLANKENSTEIN'S TIPS FOR BEGINNER SPLITBOARDERS

1. Attend splitboard demo days where you can trial different boards and see what suits your riding style
2. Go to events such as Splitfest DownUnder, where you can get a taste of the sport and chat to experts in the industry
3. Sign up for an Avalanche Safety Training course (AST 1) so you can develop your backcountry skills before venturing too far
4. Chat to locals about terrain and weather conditions, past and present
5. Make sure your gear is in top shape before heading out

users to traverse uphill like a cross-country skier. Once they've reached their destination, the two pieces re-connect, the skins are removed and the user can descend like they would on a regular snowboard.

John Blankenstein, a Jones Snowboards sponsored rider, says a splitboarder's domain is entirely beyond ski resort boundaries.

"Unlike resort riding, where you're guaranteed a high-speed quad ride to the summit, splitboarding relies heavily on an individual's ability, both physical and mental, to evaluate and safely navigate alpine terrain," says the NSW-based athlete. "Runs are not groomed and accessed via

lift systems. Rather, they're earned through long Nordic approaches."

Rush Distribution product manager Amine Yasmine says splitboarding is growing, and if anyone is at the forefront of the industry in Australia, it's him. Rush Distribution is the Australian/New Zealand distributor of Jones Snowboards, as well as Spark R&D snowboard bindings. When it comes to splitboards, Jones Snowboards is the market leader. The company is the brainchild of American professional snowboarder Jeremy Jones, who, arguably, is the biggest champion of splitboarding. According to Yasmine, industry experts are expecting the sport to continue to grow in the years to come as freestyle riders want to take their skill-set to the back country, where they not only have slopes to themselves but where they have access to natural features to hit, such as boulders and cornices. Rising interest in splitboarding has even spawned Splitfest DownUnder, a festival held over three days (21-23 of August) in the NSW Snowy Mountains. Splitboarding tours are also becoming available, with Jindabyne-based company Main Range Backcountry leading the way.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

So how does a splitboard compare to a typical snowboard? When it comes to weight, there's not much difference, says Yasmine.

"Not so long ago, there was quite a big gap between the weight and performance of a regular board and a splitboard, but nowadays that's been bridged almost completely," he explains.

In order for that to happen, splitboards are generally made from better quality materials, which is why they have a higher price tag.

"The companies that really are serious about snowboarding are definitely putting a lot of R&D (research and development) into making sure these things use different materials, are made differently, so the performance is as per a solid board but they obviously split apart for touring," says Yasmine.

With shape, splitboards are mostly one directional, however some companies have started producing twins as the industry anticipates interest in them to increase.

When it comes to picking your first splitboard, Jones Snowboards is one company that's made the choice easy. It offers splitboard versions of its solid boards, making the switch from ski resort

to back country effortless.

Another difference is splitboards are generally softer, simply due to the fact that a product that separates into two isn't as strong as a single, solid product. Again, however, companies are investing a lot of time into figuring out how to ensure riders get near solid performance from a splitboard.

For Blankenstein, splitboarding and resort snowboarding are polar opposites.

Splitboarding, he says, offers a refreshing alternative to resort riding that rewards maturity and provides for greater decision-making skills.

"There is no ski patrol in the back country (and) good navigational and wilderness survival skills are paramount if travelling deep and on extended missions into the back country," Blankenstein says. Comfort and experience go hand in hand.

GETTING THE GEAR

People who are attracted to splitboarding aren't beginner snowboarders but seasoned riders looking for the next challenge or adventure. That means there's no such thing as an entry-level splitboard, in a traditional sense. There are entry-level prices, however, and those boards are designed slightly differently to higher end boards.

"Generally, the same as a normal board, they're more forgiving to ride and instead of the (design) focus being on maybe stiffness and a lightweight product, it tends to go back to more durability, as more entry-level products do," says Yasmine.

With the cost of splitboards starting at around \$650 and reaching the \$1200 mark, the cheaper alternative for snowboarders keen to try the sport would be to carry their regular board and hike wearing snowshoes. Yasmine says snowshoeing has its advantages for shorter runs with steeper terrain, but he believes if you want to access more remote areas, the speed and efficiency of touring on a splitboard is superior. But, he admits there is a big barrier for those wanting to try splitboarding for the first time.

"It's expensive but, again, the efficiency of the touring is so much better. Australia's pretty open and spread out in terms of our mountains, especially up behind Perisher and Thredbo, so being able to cover more distance in less time is a real advantage." As with touring skis, splitboards require synthetic and mohair nylon skins, which are sold separately. If it all sounds like it'll


TOP ACCESS POINTS

*Guthega, in Perisher ski resort, offers great access to the Main Range in Kosciuszko National Park, in the NSW Snowy Mountains

*Dead Horse Gap, past Thredbo ski resort, beside the Alpine Way, in the Snowy Mountains

*Razorback Ridge, near Mount Hotham Alpine Resort, in the Victorian Alps

*Mount Stirling, near Mount Buller, in the Victorian Alps



Splitboarding is fast becoming a niche interest sport in its own right, as these photos of the 2014 Splitfest attest.

Photos: Adam West

set you back too much money, you can turn a regular snowboard into a splitboard with a DIY split kit - a good option for old boards collecting dust in your spare room. Some companies are also making solid boards that can be split years down the track, once you've finished riding them as regular boards.

The traditional rule with snowboarding in the backcountry is to ride a longer board that floats more easily on powder. You can apply the same rule for splitboarding, but constant improvements in design technology mean you don't have to. What's called 'rocker' technology is a common feature in splitboards. This is when a board curves upwards at both nose and tail, offering better float in fresh snow and making it more responsive to turning and, subsequently, less aggressive. This design means riders can use shorter boards in powder than they could a decade ago.

"From a design aspect, we're seeing

influences from surfing whereby people are surfing way shorter boards that are actually floating way bigger," says Yasmine. "So the volume displacement that's being factored in when they're making snowboard moulds is very similar to that of surfing."

When it comes to bindings, riders can also buy kits that allow you to use regular snowboard bindings on a splitboard, however, as far as Yasmine is concerned, they don't work as well.

"They're a kind of stepping stone," he says. "Not many people last long on them but, hey, they're a lot cheaper than a splitboard binding."

The starting price for a splitboard binding is around \$300 and they have very different mounting patterns than those used on a regular board. As for boots, again you can get away with using regular snowboard boots, but there are splitboard-specific boots, too. These have been

reinforced to cope with the extra pressure put on boots when touring. They also have more grip on the sole, making them safer when having to un-strap from your splitboard to navigate rocky terrain.

THE APPEAL

Although there's no doubt splitboarding is a niche sport, anyone following the industry will have noticed how it's recently been receiving more attention and media exposure. This is largely due to high-profile athletes, such as Jeremy Jones, influencing riding styles over the past six or so years.

"But the sport has definitely existed with a very small but healthy fan base for quite some time," says Yasmine.

He admits splitboarding seems new to many people because it's only recently been getting the attention it deserves. It's only been the last couple of years that splitboarding gear has been widely

available in Australia, with more bricks and mortar retail stores introducing them to their product ranges.

For Yasmine, the appeal of splitboarding is about the stoke. "I just get such strong parallels from surfing in the ocean and surfing in the mountains," he says. "It's kind of the same thing to me, and the joy that I get from surfing a new wave or going to a spot that's pumping where there's no-one else...is something that words simply can't articulate. And I get that every time I go splitboarding, because you go to a different spot and you go to a different zone and you're really looking for perfect conditions."

It's also about taking the sport to the next level. Experienced snowboarders tend to long for bigger mountains and new runs

to progress their skills, and splitboarding provides that. For others, it's about the exploration of remote alpine wilderness and to satiate a need for adventure.

"Our domain is wild and untamed, forged by the seasons and as unpredictable as the mountains themselves," says Blankenstein.

"Splitboarding is the distant peak you spy while sitting on a chair; where your imagination takes hold, projecting your mind into the unknown."

"Splitboarding is the purest form of travel into the back country and provides the ultimate vehicle for winter adventures." **W**



jonesnowboards.com
sparkrandd.com
splitfest.com.au
mrbc.com.au



GEAR CHECKLIST

- **Splitboard:** Splitboards range in price from about \$650 to \$1200. Unfortunately, there are few boards specifically designed for women on the market, so female riders have to settle for limited choice or buy from the men's range.
- **DIY split kit:** Options are limited but these cost about \$160 and are for riders who want to convert their regular solid snowboards.
- **Bindings:** Splitboard bindings look similar to regular bindings and have high backs, ankle straps, toecaps and solid base plates. They cost anywhere from about \$270 to \$880.
- **Skins:** The price of climbing skins for splitboards hover between \$130 and \$200, and come in a combination of materials and designs.
- **Boots:** Expect to pay about \$350 for a pair of splitboard boots.
- **Poles:** As with ski touring, splitboarding requires climbing poles. These are aluminium and adjustable, and cost about \$130 a pair.





Nutty nourishment

Having learnt first-hand what can happen when key nutrients are left out of an adventurer's diet, *Andrew Davison* now includes nuts in as many recipes as possible

Four weeks into the Australian Alps walking track, I began to notice my meals were not satisfying my hunger and I had also lost considerable weight. It appeared I had depleted my energy and fat reserves. However, apart from the constant desire to eat, I was feeling great, fit and agile. The following two weeks of the walk had me

considering where my menu was lacking? It was evident my portions could have been larger, but an extra handful of rice in each meal was likely not the only answer. My menu was high in carbohydrates; I noted that apart from a very limited ration of chocolate and the milk powder on my cereal, I was not consuming any fats.

I now add a great variety to the menu and try adding ingredients that provide some of the essential nutrients the body requires. One of the many additions are nuts as they provide healthy fats, protein and fibre. I don't just add them to my scroggin; I include them in my meals, cooking them with grains, legumes and vegetables.

CARROT AND NUT RICE

Serves 2

1 tablespoon of oil
 ½ an onion or 1 dessertspoon of dried onion flakes
 1 clove of garlic
 1 carrot (grated or finely chopped)
 1 cup rice
 1 teaspoon cumin seeds

2 teaspoon of ground coriander
 2 teaspoon of mustard seeds
 4 cardamom pods
 ¾ cup mixed nuts (preferably unsalted)
 2 ½ cups water
 Salt and pepper to taste

AT HOME

Dry roast the nuts in a fry pan until lightly browned. Pack the spices together.

IN THE FIELD

Heat the oil, fry the finely chopped onion and garlic for a minute before adding the spices until fragrant. Then add the water, rice and the grated carrot and simmer, stirring occasionally and adding more water if necessary until rice is cooked and all the water is absorbed. Now stir through the nuts and season with salt and pepper.



CASHEW NUT CURRY

Serves 2

2 tablespoons of oil
½ an onion or 1 dessertspoon of dried onion flakes
1 clove of garlic
2.5cm piece of ginger
1 teaspoon of ground cumin
½ teaspoon of ground turmeric
1 teaspoon of ground coriander
½ teaspoon of garam masala
6 dried curry leaves (optional)
1 cup of cashew nuts (unsalted)
75g or 1/3 of a cup of coconut milk powder
1 cup of water
Salt to taste

IN THE FIELD

Over a medium heat add oil to a large pot and fry the finely chopped onion, ginger and garlic for a minute. Now add spices and fry for a further minute. Now add the cashew nuts, stir-frying until the nuts are lightly fried and coated in the spices. Now add the water followed by the coconut milk powder and simmer until the liquid has reduced and the sauce has thickened. Season with salt and serve over rice.

Andrew Davison takes pleasure in the simplicity of being in the bush. A world traveller and culinary connoisseur, he has become a regular *Wild* contributor.

Time to gear up for a new year of adventure...



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1 Brindabella sleeping bag \$729.95

850 loft down filling that's been treated for water-resistance in a 4 season sleeping bag weighing in at 1160g. Comfort rated to -4 degrees for women and -11 for men. mont.com.au

2 Venture Nomad 7 Kit \$269

A waterproof power kit including portable panel and battery recharger from GoalZero. Designed to keep your devices juiced while in the field. goalzero.com.au

3 ProLite Plus mattress \$420

Includes the new Atmos foam to boost compressibility and self-inflating properties while reducing overall weight. The warmest of Therm-a-Rest's ultra light self-inflating mattresses. spelean.com.au

4 Oxygen GTX \$289.95

A mixed-terrain shoe that employs Gore-Tex Surround for water resistance and breathability. Weighing 440g per shoe, this shoe from Scarpa offers true versatility. outdooragencies.com.au

5 WB300 \$74.99

Anodised aluminium rooftop ski and snowboard carrier with a low-profile aesthetic. Proprietary hinge design carries up to 6 pairs of skis or 4 snowboards. whispbar.com.au

6 Den Beanie \$34.99

This warm winter hat from Kaos is made from Woolmark wool and features a full fleece lining, finished with a coat of 3M water repellent. Ideal for snow sports and play. kaosnow.com

7 Brenta II \$399.95

Updated this year, the classic European Stadler hiking boot is built rugged with a water resistant trekking nubuck and calf hide lining. Suited to unforged rugged and unstable tracks. carinthia.com.au

8 Compressible Pillow \$64.95

Therm-a-Rest's soft, expandable pillow is now available in extra large size for anyone looking for that extra comfort while camping or travelling. spelean.com.au

9 Women's Karamu Jacket \$194.99

A 2-layer shell jacket weighing 528g (size 10). Waterproof, breathable and includes ventilation pit zips, waterproof zippers and internal security pocket. gondwanaoutdoor.com

10 Black Merino Fleece Socks \$27.50

Made from 83% Australian Fine Merino wool, these socks from Wilderness Wear are designed for cushioning and warmth. Specialised seams reduce slippage and added nylon reinforces high abrasion zones. wildernesswear.com.au

11 Downmat Winterlite M \$279.95

A goose-down filled sleeping mat from Exped weighing in at 475g and rated for -32 degrees. Perfect for a good night's sleep during any snow-based expedition. intertrek.com.au

12 UH35-3 triple pack \$79.95

UHF two-way, handheld radios from Uniden offer an easy solution for staying in touch with the group while out on the track. Compact, shock resistant with a 20-hour battery life. uniden.com.au



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13 Kids Stowaway Overpant \$54.99

Rainbird Clothing's overpants for kids are highly breathable while also waterproofed to 5000mm. Packs down into the back pocket and included stowbag for portability. rainbirdclothing.com

14 Teton Jacket \$449.98

A ski jacket from Kathmandu that includes body-mapped insulation to balance warmth and freedom of movement, it also includes a range of specialised pockets. kathmandu.com.au

15 Beer and Soda Starter Kit \$99.95

Conveniently pack beers on your next multiday adventure with Pat's Backcountry Beverages. Just add brew concentrate to water with Pat's carbonating activator sachets. vestalwater.com

16 Fuse Brigandine Jacket \$650

A waterproof, breathable jacket from The North Face for the winter season. Featuring new FuseForm construction resulting in apparel without seams. thenorthface.com

17 Ding Dong \$699

A 3-in-1 sledgehammer, ram and pry bar measuring 68cm and weighing just 5.55kg from Gerber. A companion tool for volunteers and professionals in search and rescue or the CFA. platac.com

18 Flight Deck \$229.95

Snow sports goggles from Oakley that feature the new Prizm lens technology that allows the user to see better detail in the snow with 'precision colour tuning'. oakley.com

19 WonderWool \$10

100% Australian wool fleece that's soft, washed and carded. A single, 20g bag is ideal for use in preventing chafing and blisters in high friction areas over a three-day trip. wonderwool.com.au

20 Synmat Winterlite M \$169.96

With a thickness of 9cm and filled with Exped's proprietary Texpeclift Microfibre, this sleeping mat is rated suitable down to -17 degrees. Weighs 405g and packs down to 21cm x 11cm. intertrek.com.au

21 Fuse Brigandine Pant \$550

Companion pants for The North Face's FuseForm jacket, they include an extra layer of abrasion-proof fabric in high wear areas and unique seamless construction. spelean.com.au

22 ProGear iPad Air case \$119.95

Rugged. Tested to military standards to survive drop impacts, and sealed against water and dust. Perfect for travel, work and adventures, it's also available for iPad Mini models. pelicanprogear.com.au

23 Sherman Gilet \$159.99

This jacket from NosiLife includes 13 various pockets and is designed with UV-protecting, breathable materials that also repels flying insects. craghoppers.com

24 Snow Roller \$199.98

Transport ski or snowboard gear with this water-resistant, padded roller from Kathmandu. Includes shoulder strap and handles for easy portability. kathmandu.com.au

TRIED AND TESTED

Gaiters are a gear staple of all Australian adventurers, and the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club were keen to put a selection to the test

Around the world the practice of wearing clothes is generally accepted as normal. While not every culture's standards and styles of dress are the same, clothing as a concept is ubiquitous. Early on in human history, these items took on added significance as items of fashion rather than solely being worn for their protective value. However, some examples of the latter remain.

The humble gaiter continues to exist as a garment to be worn without a hint of pretense. It's very likely that this will always be the case. Gaiters are apparel borne and worn of necessity. Strapping over the lower leg and top of the shoe, a gaiter is designed to protect the lower leg against the elements, flora and low-lying wildlife. For this reason, the earliest examples were leather, strapped on

with buckles and were therefore very heavy and ungainly. Senior readers might recall a time when gaiters were all made from canvas; a time before velcro or even elastic ties. In those days, it was expected that a rugged day of hiking would mean your legs were drenched in sweat, mud or a mixture of the two, but at least you'd avoided having your lower legs impaled, bitten or sliced to smithereens.

Brand	Model	Type	Leg	Foot	Sizes (cm)	Recommended for	RRP
Outdoor Research	Crocodile	Heavy duty, multipurpose	70D Gore-Tex	1000D Cordura at foot	S, M, L, XL, XXL	Off-track bushwalking, mountaineering, snowshoeing	\$99
Sea To Summit	Quagmire eVent (also available in canvas)	Heavy duty, multipurpose	500D eVent	1000D Kodra	S, M, L, XL	Off-track bushwalking, mountaineering, snowshoeing	\$89.95
Wilderness Equipment	Bush Gaiters	Heavy duty, multipurpose	Canvas	1000D Kodra	XXS, XS, S, M, L, XL	Off-track bushwalking, snowshoeing, thick scrub	\$79
Kathmandu	Gaiters NGX - Long	Lightweight, multipurpose	Nylon	1000D Nylon	S, M, L	General bushwalking, muddy conditions	\$119.98
Kathmandu	Short Gaiters	Lightweight, low cut	N/A	Nylon	S/M, L/XL	Track walking, walking in grass, trailrunning	\$49.98
Outdoor Research	Wrapid Gaiters	Lightweight, low cut	N/A	Nylon, Polyester	S/M, L/XL	Track walking, walking in grass, trailrunning	\$69.95

A NOTE ON MATERIALS

These days, anyone considering a new pair of gaiters has a lot more choice available to them, not only in terms of the brands that offer them, but also in the materials they're constructed from. The specific combination of materials used will alter the waterproofing, breathability, weight, flexibility and durability of the garment, so it's worth taking a closer look at this particular part of the gaiters' construction.

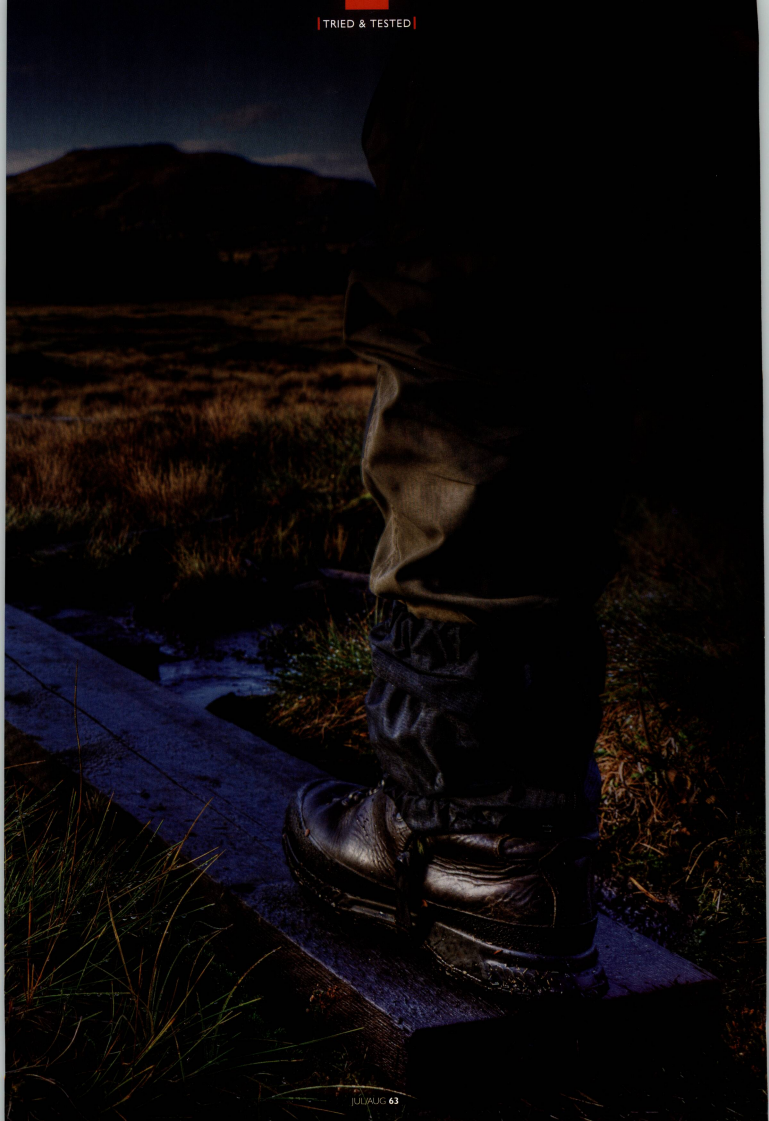
- **Canvas** – Very heavy-duty, but also heavier than its synthetic counterparts, canvas was once the staple of the outdoor industry. Organic materials can be harder to clean, they tend to be susceptible to microbes and generally wear faster; this is due to its highly absorbent nature. Canvas must be treated with a wax, or more recently, synthetic coating in order to be waterproof. However, canvas is also said to have a 'self-healing' property,

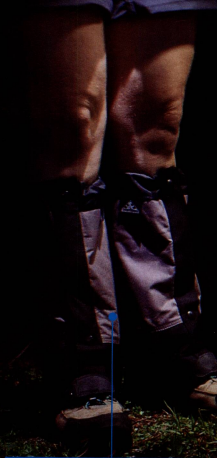
where fibres naturally fill any small snags or holes that occur.

- **Nylon** – This synthetic polymer has become the go-to material from which many modern fabrics are derived. The specific qualities of a nylon-based fabric will depend on the specific weave and layering methods employed by the textiles manufacturer.
- **Kodra (Cordura)** – A nylon-based product, this fabric has been in use in the consumer outdoor gear and apparel market since the 70s as a canvas alternative, however it isn't considered waterproof unless it has been treated with a polyurethane coating. Kodra balances weight with abrasion resistance to make it a desirable outdoors fabric.
- **Gore-Tex** – Discovered in 1969, Gore-Tex is an expanded form of polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) that is notable in its ability to repel liquid

water while still allowing water vapour to pass through it. However, because its waterproofing is compromised by contaminants (such as dirt and oil) most garments made with Gore-Tex include multiple layers, where the PTFE component is combined with abrasion-proof and waterproof coatings, such as polyurethane. Unfortunately, this means the transfer of water vapour is reduced.

- **eVent** – A competitor product to Gore-Tex, eVent fabrics are also an expanded PTFE, yet these are generally combined with an 'oleophobic' (oil-repelling) coating that is meant to preserve the best features of the expanded PTFE and also prevent contaminants from comprising them. But, as eVent has spent less time being tested and refined in the market, its long term durability remains a question.





**WILDERNESS EQUIPMENT BUSH
GAITERS - \$79**

TESTED BY DANIEL BERTON, LOREN
LEONG & KRISSIE PISKORZ

The Bush Gaiters from Wilderness Equipment are by far the most rugged-feeling gaiters we tried in this survey, a sensation provided by corespun canvas legs that feature stiffeners in front for added shin protection. The tight canvas weave may also make these the more puncture-resistant of the other models we've tried, but that's based more on prior experience than with first-hand evidence in this round of testing.

The shape of the calf area should allow for a superior fit for most users, while the six different size options make these gaiters a stand-out for anyone that finds their legs are hard to fit for.

No adjustments were required during testing so it seems that closures, hooks and tabs all performed well. Of note, however, is the simple elastic instep strap. While Wilderness Equipment do include a spare and they are relatively easy to replace, this does represent a point of concern if you're ever in a position to have to replace the strap halfway through an event or multi-day adventure.

Being canvas, these gaiters also appeared to get dirtier faster than their synthetic counterparts and were likewise more difficult to clean. Would normally be considered for mountaineering activities but we feel the elastic strap counts these gaiters out over rocky terrain.



**KATHMANDU GAITERS NGX -
LONG - \$119.98**

TESTED BY SYTSKE HILLENIOUS

Gaiters from Kathmandu are a little bit of a novelty for us, as we wouldn't normally consider them suitable for our needs. In particular, their slightly baggy cut make them far from suitable for using with crampons. That being said, we were impressed by these gaiters and as such they certainly deserve a look in.

As part of Kathmandu's NGX range, they're made with a nylon-based textile that is designed to compete with the Gore-Tex/Cordura combination present in the Crocodiles, but it's our feeling it's less likely to wear well over time. However, they are exceptionally lightweight and met with baseline waterproofing and breathability needs (again, this is expected to decrease with wear).

Fit was adequate but closures, buckles and straps weren't ideal. In particular, we found the adjustable buckles on the side to flap around and get caught on things; these would need to be cut down by the individual once adjusted for size. On top of this, the gaiters did begin to come undone over the course of prolonged activity.

The hardest part of these gaiters is the metal instep strap, which in itself may represent a hazard as these kinds of straps are known to cut into the soles of shoes from time to time.

For an entry-level adventurer or casual user willing to wait until sales time, these gaiters would make a solid first choice.



**OUTDOOR RESEARCH WRAPID
GAITERS - \$69.95**

TESTED BY RHONDA STAFFORD

These are ostensibly designed as a through-hiker or trailrunner's gaiter and therefore are another example of gaiters suited to the rising number of outdoor users that spend their time moving quickly over formed tracks or relatively easy terrain (in terms of scrub coverage). If that's your bag, then these may well be your gaiters. Lightweight and easy to pack, the Wrapid Gaiters also stayed in place while both walking and running. Made from a blend of nylon, polyester and spandex, they're advertised as water-resistant and breathable. Both claims do meet baseline-testing standards over the course of our trials. They are also designed for the more fashion-conscious athlete, with a generally subtle colour and hint of fluoro flair. Perfect for low-key bushwalks, whereas some trailrunners may be looking for something even more minimalist.





**OUTDOOR RESEARCH
CROCODILE - \$99**

TESTED BY OLIVIA GROVER
JOHNSON

The Outdoor Research Crocodile has been the benchmark of the modern gaiter for years now and as such it has claimed a place in many hearts. Designed with a fairly wide circumference, these gaiters are suitable for more technical adventuring such as mountaineering or other activities where large boots are worn. That being said, some mountaineers may still prefer a canvas alternative for added thickness or perhaps additional scuff patches to prevent self-inflicted crampon injuries.

Hooks, tabs and closures are all up to the mark, true to the Crocodile's reputation and the heavy-duty synthetic instep strap appears to be ready for whatever you can throw at it without cutting into the soles of your shoe.

All in all, the Crocodile from Outdoor Research is exceptional in its singular performance in the market and there are only a few niggling issues that count against it. In our trials, we found the elastic cord at the top of the gaiter became easily twisted with use, which can be annoying. We also noted that the Gore-Tex leg doesn't allow for as much ventilation as hoped, and some sweat build up occurs as a result.

**SEA TO SUMMIT QUAGMIRE
eVENT - \$89.95**

TESTED BY JAMES CRISTOFARO,
KRISSE PISKORZ & ROBERT
SPRINGER

While we were very keen to put this eVent-based version of the Quagmire to the test, it's important to note that there is a canvas model available for those interested.

Closely modelled after the Crocodile, most people will find the Quagmire familiar and comfortable to wear as a result. An anatomical fit and the very lightweight feel of the eVent fabric makes them even more so, however this may result in some concerns from wearers looking for something that feels tough.

Hooks, tabs and closures do well to keep the garment in place, however taking it on and off is complicated slightly by the rubber instep strap. This strap is designed to be adjustable, but due to its rugged nature this isn't always a straightforward task – some would say this is a small price to pay, as this strap is often the first point of failure in a gaiter.

A final note: one of our testers did find that regardless of eVent's breathability, he still found a certain level of moisture building up inside the gaiters after a long day of hiking. Further testing would be required to ascertain a definitive difference in breathability between the Crocodile and the Quagmire as a result.

**KATHMANDU SHORT
GAITERS - \$49.98**

TESTED BY OLIVIA GROVER
JOHNSON

While not typically suited to our club's uses, it's interesting to see how the low-cut or short gaiter market has evolved in recent years. However, it's important to highlight that these are not for more serious adventuring, but rather designed for light hiking or even trailrunning on well-formed trails or grass. Unlike full-length gaiters, these types of gaiters will not protect your shins or calves from rough scrub or snakebite. They will stop burrs and seeds from getting into your socks, as well as the occasional twig that may flick up at ankle height.

As a result, we find these gaiters are likely well suited to their intended use, the only major drawback being the lightweight cord used for the instep strap. Our experience tells us this will wear out almost as quickly as elastic, particularly over rocky terrain.

Mount Buffalo

A key area for many dedicated walkers, *Bruce and Alistair Paton* nominate their favourite routes in Mount Buffalo NP



Mount Dunn summit
Photos: Alistair and Bruce Paton

When Hume and Hovell came across a giant lump of granite on their way to Port Phillip in 1824 and called it Mount Buffalo, you can see what they had in mind.

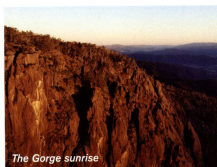
The plateau, once part of the seabed, rises up to 1500 metres, an outpost of the Great Dividing Range 50 kilometres away. Long before Hume and Hovell arrived, the Minjambuta people climbed to the top in summer to feast on the protein-rich Bogong moths. European settlers tried cattle

grazing and mining on the plateau, and in the late 19th Century guides were taking visitors up the mountain to enjoy the unique alpine scenery. In 1898 it became one of Victoria's first national parks (along with Wilsons Promontory) after lobbying by the Bright Alpine Club.

There are more than 90 kilometres of walking tracks on Mount Buffalo that explore a spectacular landscape of granite tors, snowgrass plains, alpine ash and snow gum forests dissected

by creeks, many of which plunge over the cliffs at the plateau's edge to the valley hundreds of metres below.

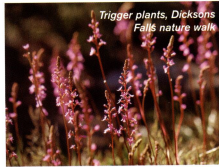
The size of the plateau (31,000 hectares) limits the length of bushwalking expeditions to a couple of days at most but its isolation creates a unique landscape where you can walk for a few hours and feel like you're the only person on the plateau. And the compact size means all the best spots are easy to get to.



The Gorge sunrise



Flame robin at Cresta Valley



Trigger plants, Dicksons Falls nature walk

FLORA AND FAUNA

Wombats are common and swamp wallabies are also regularly spotted by walkers. Greater gliders and eastern pygmy possums are active at night but harder to spot. Crimson rosellas and gang gang cockatoos are commonly seen along with smaller birds like the striking flame robin. The park is home to a surprising variety of eco-systems ranging from snow gum woodland to sphagnum moss beds. Wildflowers produce an explosion of colour especially in early summer.

ACCESS

Mount Buffalo is 325km from Melbourne – take the Hume Highway to Wangaratta then follow signs towards Bright. A winding road to the top turns off the Great Alpine Road at the small town of Porepunkah (7km west of Bright). Allow about four hours to drive from Melbourne; from Porepunkah it's about half an hour to the top.

WEATHER

In winter the plateau is covered by a blanket of snow which limits bushwalking opportunities but the sightseeing is fantastic and it's a great spot to bring snow shoes, a toboggan or cross-country skis – there are 14km of groomed trails and a further 20km of remote cross-country trails. There is even a ski lift or two at Cresta Valley and, unlike most alpine resorts, park entry is free. In summer temperatures are a few degrees cooler than at sea level which usually makes for pleasant walking, although extremely hot days are still possible – wear sunscreen and drink plenty of water. Fire is the other danger – the park suffered major damage from a large bushfire in 2007.

CAMPING AND ACCOMMODATION

There is a large camping area beside Lake Catani that is open for car-based camping from November to April. A small number of sites are available for snow camping in winter. There is a toilet and shower block

in the middle of the campground. Remote bush camping is available at Rocky Creek and Mount McLeod for a limited number of hikers. Bookings are required for all campsites.

SAFETY/WARNINGS

Many tracks are near cliffs – follow signs, stay behind barriers and use commonsense. Bushfire warnings should also be heeded. Most wildlife is happy to go about its business if undisturbed but be aware there are venomous snakes in the park, including copperheads.

TRACKS

Most of the track network is extremely well graded but paths can be a bit rougher in more remote parts of the park. In some places rock cairns mark the route and some of the most enjoyable walks involve following arrows over, between and under boulders. Many of the most exposed peaks have metal ladders and fences but don't let the intrusions spoil the wilderness atmosphere.

MAPS

The Spatial Vision Mount Buffalo 1:30,000 covers the whole park and has lots of useful info on the back.

Further Information

For info on the national park and walks and to book a campsite phone Parks Victoria on 13 19 63.

THE WALK

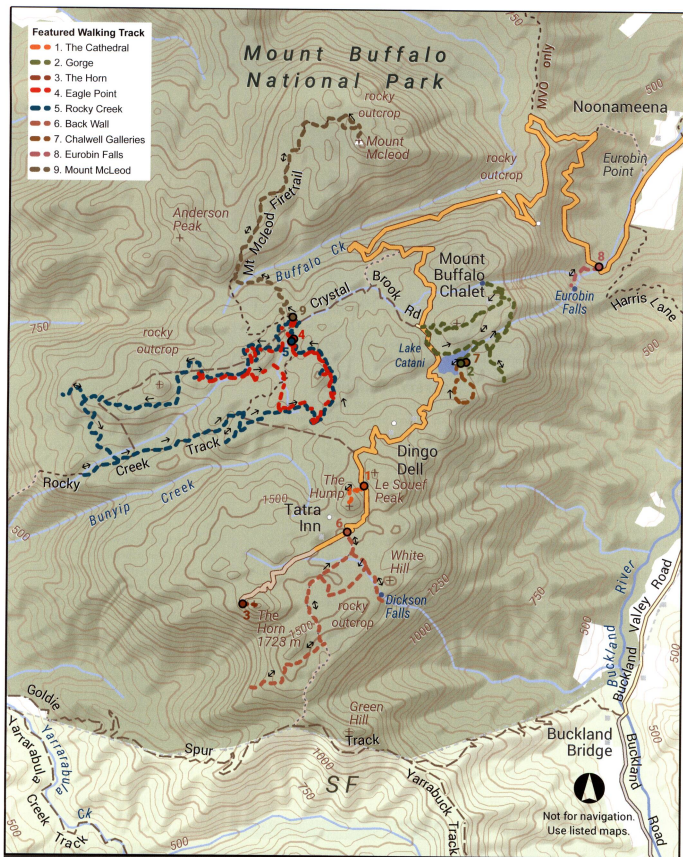
1. The Cathedral (2km)

The single most striking feature of the plateau shouldn't be missed, and you will work up a sweat even though the track is short and heavily constructed. It climbs stone steps on increasingly more acute switchbacks for 500 metres to reach the base of The Cathedral, a pile of huge boulders that towers over the track. The path then veers left and continues up The Hump, the hill next to the

Cathedral that is higher but has a somewhat less inspiring name. A final scramble up a rock gully leads to the exposed summit and commanding views over the Cathedral and most of the plateau. This is a great spot to watch the sun set (remember to bring a torch so you can find your way down).

2. The Gorge, the Monolith and Haunted Gorge (8km)

A terrific half-day circuit from the Lake Catani campground that visits all the best features of the eastern end of the plateau, including the giant cliffs of The Gorge (there is a car park at the Gorge if you are pressed for time, but this is much more fun). Starting at the picnic shelter walk for 500 metres on a wide path that passes the dam wall (the lake was created when the creek was dammed in 1910) to a bridge. Turn off just before the bridge on to the View Point Nature Walk. Ignore a turnoff to the Underground River (you'll be going there a little later) and climb steadily through alpine ash forest to View Point for excellent views from the edge of the plateau over the farmland of the Buckland Valley. Return via the same track and turn off on the path to Underground River. The track drops steeply into Haunted Gorge to cross the river – between the rocks is the entrance to the unseen river. Cavers with the right gear and experience can continue that way, but it's interesting to take a peek at the rushing water before climbing out of the gorge and following a pleasant trail through the forest to Billions Lookout for more views. From here it's 300 metres to the large car park for day visitors to the area. The chalet that hosted visitors for over a century before closing after the 2007 bushfires is due to reopen it as a day visitor facility in 2016. Until then a coffee van operates in the car park. Don't miss the view from Bents Lookout of the sheer 300-metre cliffs of the North Wall of the Gorge and the Victorian Alps beyond – before continuing north to pick up the Gorge Heritage Walk. There are a few more



Hema
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- Arterial: Sealed; Unsealed
- Local Road: Sealed; Unsealed
- Track, Easy
- Management Vehicle Track
- Bikeway Walkway
- Native Well; Pool; Rockhole;
Spring; Waterfall; Waterhole;
Waterpoint; Soak



0 0.5 1 mi
0 1 2 km



Back Wall track sign

viewpoints before reaching a bridge where the path crosses Crystal Brook just before the creek plunges over the cliffs. Turn around here and return to the southern end of the car park and the wide path to Lake Catani. You aren't on this for long before reaching another junction – follow the signs to The Monolith for a much more interesting return journey. Turn right at the next two junctions then climb to the giant balancing rock that offers commanding views over Lake Catani. After enjoying the view return to the main track and turn right. The path winds through forest to Mount Buffalo Road – turn left and walk for 500 metres beside the road to reach the Lakeside Track. Take another left turn here and follow the path along the lakeshore to a footbridge below the dam wall at the far end. This returns you to the wide path you started on – the picnic shelter is 500 metres to your right.

3. The Horn (1km)

Another short climb, this time to the highest point on the plateau at 1723 metres. A gravel road (closed in winter) ends at a car park where there is a stone shelter and a spectacular view of the cliffs of the Wall of China. The walk is straightforward and includes some rock hopping that is assisted

in places, including the final scramble to the top, by metal handrails. The reward is a 360-degree view over the whole park and the ranges beyond – look for the jagged profile of the Crosscut Saw to the south. Bogong moths can be prolific at the top, with hawks and falcons hovering on air currents to take advantage of the feast. This is another fantastic sunset spot. Return to the car park via the same route.



Alpine everlasting near Og, Gog and Magog

4. Eagle Point and Mount Dunn (12km)

A network of walking tracks lead to a series of viewpoints and interesting rock formations on the north of the plateau with names including The Sarcophagus, Devils Couch and Cheese and Biscuits. A number of route variations are possible, but the walk described here takes in the highlights and forms a nice, neat circuit. Start at the picnic area near the end of the unsealed Reservoir Road, which leaves Mount Buffalo Road near the Parks Victoria office. Cross the creek on a wide vehicle track, pass a gate and climb for 500 metres before turning left to follow a sign to Eagle Point (the vehicle track continues all the way to Mount McLeod). A narrow track negotiates some small hills and passes the southern end of the reservoir to reach a sign marking a side-trip to Og, Gog and Magog (500 metres each way). Arrows on rocks mark a route up a gully to a vantage point on top of a large boulder with excellent views south across the plateau to the Cathedral and the Hump. Return to the main track and turn left. The path winds through eucalypt forest – wildflowers are a feature in summer – to another track junction; turn right, following the sign towards Eagle Point one kilometre away.

Cross Five Acre Plain to another sign at the start of the sidetrack to Eagle Point, a wild viewpoint reached via a medal ladder. This spot is five kilometres and about 1.5 hours from the walk start. To continue, return to the junction and turn right then right again at the next junction to head south-east; the track crosses a large snowgrass plain with wooden duckboards protecting the most sensitive areas. One kilometre from the track junction you will run into the rough Rocky Creek Track – turn left here then right 100 metres down the hill to embark on a counter-clockwise circuit of Mount Dunn. Ignore a turnoff to Macs Point after 500 metres and continue through Giants Causeway. Turn left just before Stanley Rocks (two kilometres from the Rocky Creek Track junction) to link up with the Long Plain Track – turn left here then left again after 500 metres to climb to the top of Mount Dunn. The track follows a series of switchbacks then a combination of steep metal stairs and ladders to the 1510-metre summit. This final section is very exposed, it's probably not a great spot to be if a storm is brewing. After drinking in another great view, head back down the stairs and switchbacks to the junction. Turn left and after 500 metres the track hits the Rocky Creek Track. From here it's another 500 metres to the Reservoir Road. The picnic area is a short walk down the road.

5. Rocky Creek (22km)

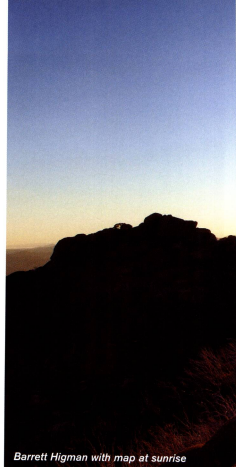
One of two overnight hikes on the plateau – neither are particularly long and they could be completed in a long day, but then you miss out on the fun of camping out in this beautiful part of the world. Follow the notes

above to Eagle Point and continue west from the lookout turnoff. The track passes through more forest then crosses Mollison Plain to reach a turnoff to Mollisons Galleries. Take the one-kilometre detour to visit another pile of boulders with fantastic views over wild untracked country to the north. Return to the junction. From here, the main track turns south and drops steeply for two kilometres to cross Rocky Creek and hit the Rocky Creek Track, which doubles as a cross-country ski trail. Turn right and walk for one kilometre to the Rocky Creek camping area; there is room for three or four tents and water is available from the creek.

Day two is spent walking back to the car park along the Rocky Creek Track, a direct journey of about seven kilometres. If you're not in a hurry, make things more interesting by turning left after four kilometres to climb to the lookout at Macs Point (leave packs at another junction below the summit). Instead of returning to the Rocky Creek Track, turn right below Macs Point to head to Split Rocks and another track junction at Giants Causeway – turn right here to join the circuit of Mount Dunn described above. This scenic return route adds up to about 13 kilometres.

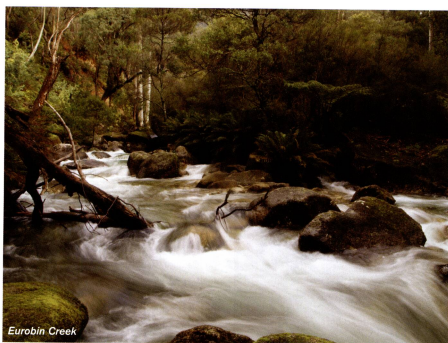
6. Dicksons Falls and Back Wall (13km)

The track to Dicksons Falls is one of the best short walks on the plateau and makes an excellent family excursion. You can turn it into a more serious half-day adventure by continuing to the Back Wall, where the plateau ends in a maze of cliffs and steep gullies. Take advantage of the large car park at Cresta Valley (used by skiers in winter) and walk back up the road for 100 metres to the

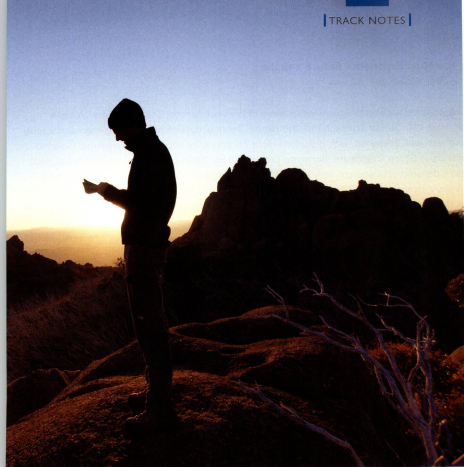


Barrett Higman with map at sunrise

start of the Dicksons Falls nature walk. Head south on what can only be described as an exceedingly pleasant walk. The track meanders across the snowgrass plains with views west to the Horn framed by snowgums, boulders and alpine bogs. This area is popular with wombats and birds and wildflowers are prolific in summer. Pass a turnoff to the Back Wall and continue along the creek to Dicksons Falls lookout where the creek tumbles over a series of cascades before plunging over the cliff. The view from the lookout (about 45 minutes' walk from the road) encompasses the major peaks of the Victorian Alps. Retrace your route to a sign about the antechinus (a furry local resident) and head left, leaving the path to walk off-track across the plain – head for the pink ski pole and cross a bridge to enter the Valley of the Gods, a slightly ambitious name for a small valley between two rocky knolls. For the next kilometre the route is marked by ski poles which are about 200 metres apart; finding your own way is enjoyable but traversing snowgrass is more tiring than it looks especially when taking care not to trample sensitive alpine vegetation. After passing through the valley the snow poles swing north and then double back to the east and hits the Back Wall track about 750 metres from where it leaves the Dicksons Falls nature walk. Turn left to follow the track to the Back Wall, a little over three kilometres away. The path heads south-west, dropping to cross a creek then climbing to a saddle before taking a sharp turn to the left. From here the track deteriorates; stone cairns mark the way in



Eurobin Creek



tree ferns. Some time can be spent enjoying this magical spot before continuing on a steeper track to a viewpoint overlooking the larger Eurobin Falls, which flow over a steeply sloping expanse of rock. Stay on the track – several people have suffered serious injuries trying to climb the falls. Return on the same track to the walk start, which is a very pleasant spot for lunch.

9. Mount McLeod (17km)

Mount McLeod is the highest point on an isolated corner of Mount Buffalo, separated from the main part of the plateau by the Buffalo Creek Valley. The result is a delightful walk with an air of wilderness that can't be matched anywhere else in the park. From Reservoir Road follow the Mount McLeod ski trail, which is essentially a closed vehicle track when not covered by snow, through the forest to the signposted shortcut track. This provides a nice break from the road bash, winding through impressive forest in the headwaters of Buffalo Creek. After rejoining the main track, cross the creek and continue northeast below Andersons Peak then up a long ridgeline with occasional views through the trees of surrounding tors and rocky peaks. About 6.5km from the walk start the track reaches Dels Plain, the designated hikers camping area. The Plain is everything you might hope for in an alpine campsite: soft snowgrass to pitch your tent, shelter from the surrounding snowgums and a composting toilet to boot. There is even water in the small creeks in the plain, although you should check with rangers to make sure they are flowing. Mount McLeod is another kilometre from the campsite – continue up the trail, which transforms into a walking track as it ascends the mountain. The views really open up here and as you reach the summit you're treated to uninterrupted views of the entire plateau and, to the north, the very distant-looking settlements of the Ovens Valley. Return to camp and the next day follow the trail back to the walk start.

some sections. The route passes the cliff edge several times before dropping through a gully and hitting a dead end at the edge of the plateau. The view from here is very rugged; the sheer 300-metre drop at The Gorge is replaced by a jumble of cliffs and rocky slopes. Take a break here before returning along the same path all the way to the Dicksons Falls nature walk, turn left here to traverse the final 500 metres to the road.

7. Chalwell Galleries (1.2km)

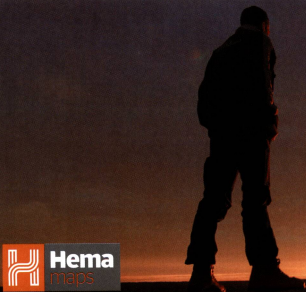
A short, fun trip that starts by walking along the road for about 200 metres to reach the start of a loop walk. Leave the road and climb steadily beside a huge pile of boulders. Then comes the fun part. An arrow indicates where the path disappears beneath the rocks – handrails assist in finding a way through a

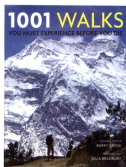
narrow fissure between the two biggest boulders. Several other rocks are jammed in the gap, which is only about a metre wide. After emerging on the southern side of the galleries, turn right to complete the circuit and walk back up the road to the campground. The Old Galleries, a few hundred metres up the Mount Buffalo Road (on the way to the Cathedral), offer a similarly enjoyable experience on a slightly smaller scale.

8. Ladies Bath Falls and Eurobin Falls (2km)

A walking track starts 200 metres up the road from the picnic area, next to a pull-off area. It climbs gently for about 500 metres to Ladies Bath Falls, which plunge into a large pool in a beautiful setting of boulders and

Prepared to explore.

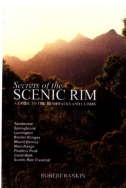




1001 Walks You Must Experience Before You Die

by Barry Stone (Pier 9, \$59.95)

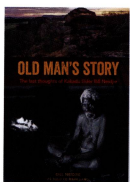
This guidebook contains a comprehensive list of some of the world's most beautiful walks. While it manages to fit in all 1001 walks in less than 1000 pages, the descriptions are nevertheless satisfactorily descriptive and also well illustrated, with beautiful colour photography appearing throughout. Collated by series editor Barry Stone, it appears that some preference has been given to Australian routes, with around 50 walks detailed (this figure is only topped by US listings, of which there are a few hundred entries). Each entry includes the location, distance covered, approximate duration and difficulty for each walk, which is then followed with a detailed description. Although this book is described as a companion guide, it's unlikely to be taken along on the journey. And while it's available in hard cover, even the paperback version weighs nearly two kilograms. For anyone planning a walking holiday or simply looking for some easy browsing material for the coffee table, this book is a must-have.



SECRETS OF THE SCENIC RIM: A GUIDE TO THE BUSHWALKS AND CLIMBS (SECOND EDITION)

by Robert Rankin (Rankin Publishers, \$24.95)

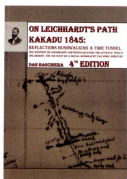
With the first edition released in 1992, author and publisher Robert Rankin has decided it's past time for his guide to the bushwalks and climbs of southeast Queensland to receive an update. Over time, not only has the landscape physically changed in places, but access to certain areas also changed according to legislation. As such, this updated version will be well-received by regular visitors to the area who own the first edition while also remaining a very informative guidebook for those picking it up for the first time. Including colour photography, maps and location-specific details, Rankin presents an exhaustive resource for anyone seeking to go adventuring in the region. While the focus is on bushwalking and a certain amount on climbing, the lists of campsites, notes on flora and fauna as well as added historical information means this guide would be a wise investment for anyone wishing to visit Queensland's Scenic Rim.



OLD MAN'S STORY: THE LAST THOUGHTS OF KAKADU ELDER BILL NEIDJIE

by Mark Lang, as told by Bill Neidjie (Aboriginal Studies Press, \$34.95)

Bill Neidjie, referred to as 'Old Man' throughout this book, wished to have some of his knowledge recorded for future generations of Gagadju and balanda (non-Aboriginal people) alike. Having been instrumental in opening up his lands to visitors and eventually world-heritage listing, Neidjie is regarded as a notable figure in Kakadu's recent history. This book is the product of his conversations with Mark Lang, who has faithfully reproduced recordings of Neidjie's words verbatim, interspersed with Lang's own perspective. The result reads almost like a play, with Lang's prose serving to provide solid moorings for Neidjie's wandering verse. Far from any hint of the mundane, this powerful account of an elderly man's thoughts is not only insightful and deeply emotive, it should also impress the reader as historically important, serving as a crucial link between cultures and generations.



ON LEICHHARDT'S PATH KAKADU 1845 (FOURTH EDITION)

by Dan Baschiera (Self-published, \$30)

Available at Charles Darwin University Bookshop and a number of other select locations in the region, here is a book that presents the combination of history and place as an adventure in itself. Following the journey of European explorer and ethnologist Ludwig Leichhardt through Kakadu in 1845, Baschiera presents his story in an academic framework brimming with quotes and excerpts drawn from his deep research on the matter. However, Baschiera has also witnessed first-hand the places Leichhardt visited and bears a deep respect for the traditional owners of the region, lending the writing a more immediate feel. The combination of these elements results in something that is at once informational and entertaining. Certainly, it is not your average guidebook to Kakadu National Park, but that's exactly what makes it well worth getting your hands on.

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148 (Jul/Aug) May 27

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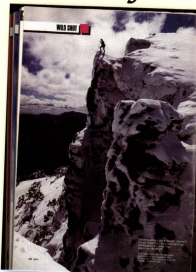
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Blast from the past



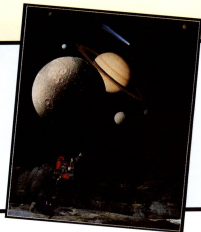
WILD HAS FEATURED

a broad range of reader-submitted photos over the years. This one, sent in by reader and contributor Glenn van der Kniff features Holger Dielenberg atop Hells Window on Mount Magdala in the Victorian Alps. This *Wild* Shot featured in issue 45, published in 1992.

WHOSE AD IS IT ANYWAY?

Answer in the next issue

Last issue:
The Alert Suit



Having spent time as an adventure guide and instructor, Stephen Prothero has not only travelled the world, he's also been instrumental to outdoor education in Australia

My parents built their home way up on the north side of Sydney near what is now Kuring-gai Chase National Park. At the end of our street was bush – and lots of it. As kids, we would run wild, exploring, swimming and yabbing across this extensive 'playground', all with the blessing of our parents.

Mum and Dad were keen gem collectors and campers. Our school holidays were grand expeditions to far-flung places across the state looking for elusive rocks and minerals, sometimes to the detriment of our family car. One time we had to push the car eight kilometres through the mud to reach Lightning Ridge.

As my 17th birthday came around, I happened across a poster advertising a Sydney-based outdoors club – Span Unlimited. From that point on my weekends were spent bushwalking, rockclimbing, canyoning and caving. My thirst for these experiences became obsessive and would keep me from mainstream employment and suburban life.

One special adventure was a trip down the Franklin River. Like everyone at the time, we were very concerned that we would never get to enjoy this wild river, so the combined Span and Ramblers (another prominent outdoors club) group set off to Tassie to raft this 'last wild river'.

My Blue Mountains obsession lasted 12 years before opportunities arose and I moved into adventure travel with a prominent international travel company. I was kept busy year-round as a ski touring and rafting guide within the eastern states of Australia. Our yearly cycle would start with rafting the Mitta Mitta, Mitchell,



Snowy and Upper Murray Rivers in the spring, Nymboida, Gwydir and Franklin Rivers over the summer months and The Herbert in northern Queensland for the Autumn. Our quieter months of the winter allowed us time to guide clients on ski touring/snow camping trips across the high plains. All through the 80s adventure travel was booming. People had the time, money and motivation to really get out to the more remote parts of the country and have adventures.

In 1990 I took leave from my job and travelled through The Americas. During my time bumming around The States, I was invited to row a raft down the Colorado River for some privateers. I jumped at the chance and two weeks later was pushing downstream in an 18-foot raft full of food, beer and gear on the 200-mile journey. Of all the rafting I had done across the world, this trip etched itself in my soul. The red striated sandstone, narrow canyons, deep green water, at times violent rapids and a desert landscape.

I returned home and needed to find work to put money back in the bank. Through my outdoor connections I was asked to apply for a job in Victoria heading up an instructor training program for the Outdoor Education Group. This was toward the end of 1991. After a successful application process I embarked on an educational journey that would become my passion and mainstay for the rest of my outdoor 'career'.

While I engage in my work role teaching

young people outdoor skills, I also like to volunteer some of my time (and family) to manage conservation properties for Bush Heritage Australia. This is very satisfying as it allows all of us (Cathy, Jirri and Toby) to actively put back into our country and the conservation of it. This has taken us to Queensland and the Central Highlands near Emerald, Carnarvon Plateau, the grassy uplands of Winton and across to the grassy plains of South Australia. Another voluntary commitment is to be involved in my local CFA brigade where I get to apply leadership in a different environment within the dynamic environment of fire.

As outdoor courses evolved and became more popular, our 'internal' training course was opened up to the wider community and became more formalised as the government started to set the Australian Training agenda into the National Training Package that we know today.

I have been part of this evolution as an active contributor, bringing outdoor education to where it is today. I now work for the Murrindindi Training Institute where I coordinate the Certificate IV and Diploma of Outdoor Recreation courses. I love what I do and have had the privilege to be part of (and influence) a great number of my graduates' lives. So many of them have gone on to work within the outdoor education industry and in turn, help direct and shape other young people. This is more important now, as more of our youth become disconnected with nature. Watching it on a screen is one way to appreciate it, but there is no substitute for being in it, smelling it, feeling it and rediscovering ourselves through it.



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